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TWO ON A TOWER.

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TWO ON A TOWER.

A Romance.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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TWO ON A TOWER.

CHAPTER I.

The summer passed away, and autumn, with its infinite suite of tints, came creeping on. Darker grew the evenings, tearfuller the moonlights, and heavier the dews. Meanwhile the comet had waxed to its largest dimensions,—so large that not only the nucleus but a portion of the tail had been visible in broad day. It was now on the wane, though every night the equatorial still afforded an opportunity of observing the singular object, which would soon disappear altogether from the heavens for perhaps thousands of years.

But the astronomer of the Rings-Hill Speer was no longer a match for his celestial materials. Scientifically he had become but a dim vapour of himself; the lover had come into him like an armed man, and cast out the student, and his intellectual situation was growing a life-and-death matter.

The resolve of the pair had been so far kept: they had not seen each other in private for three months. But on one day in October he ventured to write a note to her:—

"I can do nothing! I have ceased to study, ceased to observe. The equatorial is useless to me. This affection I have for you absorbs my life, and outweighs my intentions. The power to labour in this grandest of fields has left me. I struggle against the weakness till I think of the cause, and then I bless her. But the very

desperation of my circumstances has suggested a remedy; and this I would inform you of at once.

"Can you come to me, since I must not come to you? I will wait to-morrow night at the edge of the plantation by which you would enter to the column. I will not detain you; my plan can be told in ten words."

The night after posting this missive to her he waited at the spot mentioned.

It was a melancholy evening for coming abroad. A blusterous wind had risen during the day, and still continued to increase. Yet he stood watchful in the darkness, and was ultimately rewarded by discerning a shady muffled shape that embodied itself from the field, accompanied by the scratching of silk over stubble. There was no longer any disguise as to the nature of their meeting. It was a

lover's assignation, pure and simple; and boldly realizing it as such, he clasped her in his arms.

"I cannot bear this any longer!" he exclaimed. "Three months since I saw you alone! Only a glimpse of you in church, or a bow from the distance, in all that time! What a fearful struggle this keeping apart has been!"

"Yet I would have had strength to persist, since it seemed best," she murmured, when she could speak, "had not your words on your condition so alarmed and saddened me. This inability of yours to work, or study, or observe,—it is terrible! So terrible a sting is it to my conscience that your hint about a remedy has brought me instantly."

"Yet I don't altogether mind it, since it is you, my dear lady, who have displaced the work; and yet the loss of time nearly

distracts me, when I have neither the power to work nor the delight of your company."

"But your remedy! Oh, I cannot help guessing it! Yes; you are going away!"

"Let us ascend the column; we can speak more at ease there. Then I will explain all. I would not ask you to climb so high, but the hut is not yet furnished."

He entered the cabin at the foot, and, having lighted a small lantern, conducted her up the hollow staircase to the top, where he closed the slides of the dome to keep out the wind, and placed the observing-chair for her.

"I can stay only five minutes," she said, without sitting down. "You said it was important that you should see me, and I have come. I assure you it is at a great risk. If I am seen here at this time, I am ruined for ever. But what would I not

do for you? Oh, Swithin, your remedy—is it to go away? There is no other; and yet I dread that like death!"

"I can tell you in a moment, but I must begin at the beginning. All this ruinous idleness and distraction is caused by the misery of our not being able to meet with freedom. The fear that something may snatch you from me keeps me in a state of perpetual apprehension."

"It is too true also of me! I dread that some accident may happen, and waste my days in meeting the trouble half-way."

"So our lives go on, and our labours stand still. Now for the remedy. Dear Lady Constantine, allow me to marry you."

She started, and the wind without shook the building, sending up a yet intenser moan from the firs.

"I mean, marry you quite privately.

Let it make no difference whatever to our outward lives for years, for I know that in my present position you could not possibly acknowledge me as husband publicly. But by marrying at once we secure the certainty that we cannot be divided by accident, coaxing, or artifice; and, at ease on that point, I shall embrace my studies with the old vigour, and you yours."

Lady Constantine was so agitated at the unexpected boldness of such a proposal from one hitherto so boyish and deferential that she sank into the observing-chair, her intention to remain for only a few minutes being quite forgotten.

She covered her face with her hands. "No, no,—I dare not!" she whispered.

"But is there a single thing else left to do?" he pleaded, kneeling down beside her, less in supplication than in abandonment. "What else can we do?"

"Wait till you are famous."

"But I cannot be famous unless I strive, and this distracting condition prevents all striving!"

"Could you not strive on if I—give you a promise, a solemn promise, to be yours when your name is fairly well known?"

St. Cleeve breathed heavily. "It will be a long, weary time," he said. "And even with your promise I shall work but half-heartedly. Every hour of study will be interrupted with 'Suppose this or this happens;' 'Suppose somebody persuades her to break her promise;' worse still, 'Suppose some rival maligns me, and so seduces her away.' No, Lady Constantine, dearest, best, as you are, that element of distraction would still remain, and where that is, no sustained energy is possible. Many erroneous things have been written

and said by the sages, but never did they float a greater fallacy than that an ardent love serves as a stimulus to win the loved one by patient toil."

"I cannot argue with you," she said weakly.

"My only possible other chance would lie in going away," he resumed, after a moment's reflection, with his eyes on the lantern flame, which waved and smoked in the currents of air that leaked into the dome from the fierce wind-stream without. "If I might—take away the equatorial, supposing it possible that I could find some suitable place for observing in the southern hemisphere,—say, at the Cape,—I *might* be able to apply myself to serious work again, after the lapse of a little time. The southern constellations offer a less exhausted field for investigation. I wonder if I might!"

"You mean," she answered uneasily, "that you might apply yourself to work when your recollection of me began to fade, and my life to become a matter of indifference to you. . . . Yes, go! No,—I cannot bear it! The remedy is worse than the disease. I cannot let you go away!"

"Then how can you refuse the only condition on which I can stay, without ruin to my purpose and scandal to your name? Dearest, agree to my proposal, as you love both me and yourself!"

He waited, while the fir-trees rubbed and prodded the base of the tower, and the wind roared around and shook it; but she could not find words to reply.

"Would to God," he burst out, "that I might perish here, like Winstanley in his lighthouse! Then the difficulty would be solved for you."

"You are so wrong, so very wrong, in saying so!" she exclaimed passionately. "You may doubt my wisdom, pity my short-sightedness; but there is one thing you do know,—that I love you dearly!"

"You do,—I know it!" he said, softened in a moment. "But it seems such a simple remedy for the difficulty that I cannot see how you can mind adopting it, if you care so much for me as I do for you."

"Should we live . . . just as we are, exactly, . . . supposing I agreed?" she faintly inquired.

"Yes, that is my idea."

"Quite privately, you say. How could —the marriage be quite private?"

"I would go away to London and get a license. Then you could come to me, and return again immediately after the ceremony. I could return at leisure, and not a soul in the world would know what had

taken place. Think, dearest, with what a free conscience you could then assist me in my efforts to plumb these deeps above us! Any feeling that you may now have against clandestine meetings as such would then be removed, and our hearts would be at rest."

There was a certain scientific practicability even in his love-making, and it here came out excellently. But she sat on with suspended breath, her heart wildly beating, while he waited in open-mouthed expectation. Each was swayed by the emotion within them, much as the candle-flame was swayed by the tempest without. It was the most critical evening of their lives.

The pale rays of the little lantern fell upon her beautiful face, snugly and neatly bound in by her black bonnet; but not a beam of the lantern leaked out into the

night to suggest to any watchful eye that human life at its highest excitement was beating within that dark and isolated tower; for the dome had no windows, and every shutter that afforded an opening for the telescope was hermetically closed. Predilections and misgivings so equally strove within her still youthful breast that she could not utter a word; her intention wheeled this way and that like the balance of a watch. His unexpected proposition had brought about the smartest encounter of inclination with prudence, of impulse with reserve, that she had ever known.

Of all the reasons that she had expected him to give for his urgent request to see her this evening, an offer of marriage was probably the last. Whether or not she had ever amused herself with hypothetical fancies on such a subject,—and it was only natural that she should vaguely have done

so,—the courage in her *protégé* coolly to advance it, without a hint from herself that such a proposal would be tolerated, showed her that there was more in his character than she had reckoned on; and the discovery almost frightened her. The humour, attitude, and tenor of her attachment had been of quite an unpremeditated quality, unsuggestive of any such audacious solution to their distresses as this.

"I repeat my question, dearest," he said, after her long pause. "Shall it be done? Or shall I exile myself, and study as best I can, in some distant country, out of sight and sound?"

"Are those the only alternatives? Yes, yes; I suppose they are!" She waited yet another moment, bent over his kneeling figure, and kissed his forehead. "Yes; it shall be done," she whispered. "I will marry you."

"My angel, I am content!"

He drew her yielding form to his heart, and her head sank upon his shoulder, as he pressed his two lips continuously upon hers. To such had the study of celestial physics brought them in the space of eight months, one week, and a few odd days.

"I am weaker than you,—far the weaker," she went on, her tears falling. "Rather than lose you out of my sight I will marry without stipulation or condition. But—I put it to your kindness—grant me one little request."

He instantly assented.

"It is that, in consideration of my peculiar position in this county,—oh, you can't understand it!—you will not put an end to the absolute secrecy of our relationship without my full assent. Also, that you will never come to Welland House

without first discussing with me the advi sability of the visit, accepting my opinion on the point. There, see how a timid woman tries to fence herself in!"

"My dear lady-love, neither of those two high-handed courses should I have taken, even had you not stipulated against them. The very essence of our marriage plan is that those two conditions are kept. I see as well as you do, even more than you do, how important it is that for the present —ay, for a long time hence—I should still be but the curate's lonely son, unattached to anybody or anything, with no object of interest but his science; and you the recluse lady of the manor, to whom he is only an acquaintance."

"See what deceits love sows in honest minds!"

"It would be a humiliation to you at present that I could not bear if a mar-

riage between us were made public; an inconvenience without any compensating advantage."

"I am so glad you assume it without my setting it before you! Now I know you are not only good and true, but politic and trustworthy."

"Well, then, here is our covenant. My lady swears to marry me; I, in return for such great courtesy, swear never to compromise her by intruding at Welland House, and to keep the marriage concealed till I have won a position worthy of her."

"Or till I request it to be made known," she added, possibly foreseeing a contingency which had not occurred to him.

"Or till you request it," he repeated.

"It is agreed," murmured Lady Constantine.

CHAPTER II.

After this there only remained to be settled between them the practical details of the project.

These were that he should leave home in a couple of days, and take lodgings either in the distant city of Pumpminster or in a convenient suburb of London, till a sufficient time should have elapsed to satisfy legal requirements; that on a fine morning at the end of this time she should hie away to the same place, and be met at the station by St. Cleeve, armed with the marriage licence; whence they should at once proceed to the church fixed upon for

the ceremony; returning home independently in the course of the next two or three days.

While these tactics were under discussion, the two-and-thirty winds of heaven continued, as before, to beat about the tower, though their onsets appeared to be somewhat lessening in force. Himself now calmed and satisfied, Swithin, as is the wont of humanity, took serener views of Nature's crushing mechanics without, and said, "The wind doesn't seem disposed to put the tragic period to our hopes and fears that I spoke of in my momentary despair."

"The disposition of the wind is as vicious as ever," she answered, looking into his face with pausing thoughts on, perhaps, other subjects than that discussed. "It is your mood of viewing it that has changed. 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so.'"

And, as if flatly to stultify Swithin's assumption, a circular hurricane, exceeding in violence any that had preceded it, seized hold upon Rings-Hill Speer at that moment with the determination of a conscious agent. The first sensation of a resulting catastrophe was conveyed to their intelligence by the flapping of the candle-flame against the lantern-glass; then the wind, which hitherto they had heard rather than felt, rubbed past them like a fugitive. Swithin beheld around and above him, in place of the concavity of the dome, the open heaven, with its racing clouds, remote horizon, and intermittent gleam of stars. The dome that had covered the tower had been whirled off bodily; and they heard it descend, crashing upon the trees.

Finding himself untouched, Swithin stretched out his arms towards Lady Constantine, whose apparel had been seized by

the spinning air, nearly lifting her off her legs. She, too, was as yet unharmed. Each held the other for a moment, when, fearing that something further would happen, they took shelter in the staircase.

"Dearest, what an escape!" he said, still holding her.

"What is the accident?" she asked. "Has the whole top really gone?"

"The dome has been blown off the roof."

As soon as it was practicable he relit the lantern, which had been extinguished, and they emerged again upon the leads, where the extent of the disaster became at once apparent. Saving the absence of the inclosing hemisphere, all remained the same. The dome, being constructed of wood, was light by comparison with the rest of the structure, and the wheels which

allowed it horizontal, or, as Swithin expressed it, azimuth motion, denied it a firm hold upon the walls; so that it had been lifted off them like a cover from a pot. The equatorial stood in the midst, as it had stood before.

Having executed its grotesque purpose, the wind sank to comparative mildness. Swithin took advantage of this lull by covering up the instruments with cloths, after which the betrothed couple prepared to go downstairs.

But the events of the night had not yet fully disclosed themselves. At this moment there was a sound of footsteps and a knocking at the door below.

"It can't be for me!" said Lady Constantine. "I retired to my room before leaving the house, and told them on no account to disturb me."

She remained at the top, while Swithin

went down the spiral. In the gloom he beheld Hannah.

"Oh, Master Swithin, can ye come home! The wind have blowed down the chimley that don't smoke, and the pinning-end with it; and the old ancient house, that have been in your family so long as the memory of man, is naked to the wide world! It is a mercy that your grammer were not killed, sitting by the hearth, poor old soul, and soon to walk wi' God,—for 'a 's getting wambling on her pins, Mr. Swithin, as aged folks do. As I say, 'a was all but murdered by the open elements, and doing no more harm than the babe in the wood, nor speaking one harmful word; and the fire and smoke were blowed all across house like a chapter in Revelation; and your poor reverent father's features be scorched to flakes, looking like the vilest ruffian, and the gilt frame spoiled! Every

flitch, every eye-piece, and every chine is buried under the walling; and I fed them pigs with my own hands, Master Swithin, little thinking they would come to this good-for-nothing end. Do ye collect yourself, Mr. Swithin, and come at once!"

"I will,—I will. I'll follow you in a moment. Do you hasten back again and assist.

When Hannah had departed, the young man ran up to Lady Constantine, to whom he explained the accident. After sympathizing with old Mrs. Martin, Lady Constantine added, "I thought something would occur to mar our scheme!"

"I am not quite sure of that yet."

On a short consideration with him, she agreed to wait at the top of the tower till he could come back and inform her if the accident were really so serious as to interfere with his plan for departure. He then

left her, and there she sat in the dark, alone, looking over the parapet, and straining her eyes in the direction of the homestead.

At first all was obscurity; but when he had been gone about ten minutes lights began to move to and fro in the hollow where the house stood, and shouts occasionally mingled with the wind, which retained some violence yet, playing over the trees beneath her as on the strings of a lyre. But not a bough of them was visible, a cloak of blackness covering everything netherward; while overhead the broad windy sky looked down with a strange and disguised face, the three or four stars that alone were visible being so dissociated by clouds that she knew not which they were.

Under any other circumstances Lady Constantine might have felt a nameless

fear in thus sitting aloft on a lonely column, with a forest groaning under her feet, and palæolithic dead men feeding its roots; but the recent passionate decision stirred her pulses to an intensity beside which the ordinary tremors of feminine existence asserted themselves in vain. The apocalyptic effect of the scene surrounding her was, indeed, not inharmonious, and afforded an appropriate background to her intentions.

After what seemed to her an interminable space of time, quick steps in the staircase became audible above the roar of the firs, and in a few instants St. Cleeve again stood beside her.

The case of the homestead was serious. Hannah's account had not been exaggerated in substance : the gable end of the house was open to the garden; the joists, left without support, had dropped, and

with them the upper floor. By the help of some labourers, who lived near, and Lady Constantine's man Anthony, who was passing at the time, the homestead had been propped up, and protected for the night by some rick cloths; but Swithin felt that it would be selfish in the highest degree to leave two lonely old women to themselves at this juncture. "In short," he concluded despondently, "I cannot go to stay in Pumpminster or London just now; perhaps not for another fortnight!"

"Never mind," she said cheeringly. "A fortnight hence will do as well."

"And I have these for you," he continued. "Your man Green was passing my grandmother's, on his way back from Warborne, where he had been, he says, for any letters that had come for you by the evening post. As he stayed to assist the

other men, I told him I would go on to your house with the letters he had brought. Of course I did not tell him I should see you here."

"Thank you. Of course not. Now I'll return at once."

In descending the column her eye fell upon the superscription of one of the letters, and she opened and glanced over it by the lantern light. She seemed startled, and, musing, said, "The postponement of our—intention must be, I fear, for a long time. I find that after the end of this month I cannot leave home safely, even for a day." Perceiving that he was about to ask why, she added, "I will not trouble you with the reason now; it would only harass you. It is only a family business, and cannot be helped."

"Then we cannot be married till—God knows when!" said Swithin blankly. "I

cannot leave home till after the next week or two; you cannot leave home unless within that time. So what are we to do?"

"I do not know."

"My dear, dear one, don't let us be beaten like this! Don't let a well-considered plan be overthrown by a mere accident! Here's a remedy. Do *you* go and stay the requisite time in the parish we are to be married in, instead of me. When my grandmother is again well housed, I can come to you, instead of you to me, as we first said. Then it can be done within the time."

Reluctantly, shyly, and yet with a certain gladness of heart, she gave way to his proposal that they should change places in the programme. There was much that she did not like in it, she said. It seemed to her as if she were taking the

initiative by going and attending to the preliminaries. It was the man's part to do that, in her opinion, and was usually undertaken by him.

"But," argued Swithin, "there are cases in which the woman does give the notices, and so on; that is to say, when the man is absolutely hindered from doing so; and ours is such a case. The seeming is nothing; I know the truth, and what does it matter? You do not refuse—retract your word to be my wife, because, to avoid a sickening delay, the formalities require you to attend to them in place of me?"

She did not refuse, she said. In short she agreed to his entreaty. They had, in truth, gone so far in their dream of union that there was no drawing back now. Whichever of them was forced by circumstances to be the protagonist in the

enterprise, the thing must be done. Their intention to become husband and wife, at first halting and timorous, had accumulated momentum with the lapse of hours, till it now bore down every obstacle in its course.

"Since you beg me to,—since there is no alternative between my going and a long postponement," she said, as they stood in the dark porch of Welland House before parting,—"since I am to go first, and seem to be the pioneer in this adventure, promise me, Swithin, promise your Viviette, that in years to come, when perhaps you may not love me so warmly as you do now—"

"That will never be."

"Well, hoping it will not, but supposing it should, promise me that you will never reproach me as the one who took the initiative when it should have been your-

self, forgetting that it was at your request; promise that you will never say I showed immodest readiness to do so, or anything which may imply your obliviousness of the fact that I act in obedience to necessity and your earnest prayer."

Need it be said that he promised never to reproach her with that or any other thing as long as they should live? The few details of the reversed arrangement were soon settled, Pumpminster being the place finally decided on. Then, with a warm audacity which events had encouraged, he pressed her to his breast, and she silently entered the house. He returned to the homestead, there to attend to the unexpected duties of repairing the havoc wrought by the gale.

That night, in the solitude of her chamber, Lady Constantine reopened and

read the subjoined letter—one of those handed to her by St. Cleeve :—

"—— Street, Piccadilly,

"*October* 15, 18—.

"Dear Viviette,—You will be surprised to learn that I am in England, and that I am again out of harness—unless you should have seen the latter in the papers. Rio Janeiro may do for monkeys, but it won't do for me. Having resigned the appointment, I have returned here, as a preliminary step to finding another vent for my energies; in other words, another milch cow for my sustenance. I knew nothing whatever of your husband's death till two days ago; so that any letter from you on the subject, at the time it became known, must have miscarried. Hypocrisy at such a moment is worse than useless, and I therefore do not condole with you, particularly as the event, though new to a

banished man like me, occurred so long since. You are better without him, Viviette, and are now just the limb for doing something for yourself, notwithstanding the threadbare state in which you seem to have been cast upon the world. You are still young, and, as I imagine (unless you have vastly altered since I beheld you), good-looking: therefore make up your mind to retrieve your position by a match with one of the local celebrities; and you would do well to begin drawing neighbouring covers at once. A genial squire, with more weight than wit, more realty than weight, and more personalty than realty (considering the circumstances), would be best for you. You might make a position for us both by some such alliance; for, to tell the truth, I have had but in-and-out luck so far. I shall be with you in little more than a

fortnight, when we will talk over the matter seriously, if you don't object. Your affectionate brother,

"LOUIS."

It was this allusion to her brother's coming visit which had caught her eye in the tower staircase, and led to a modification in the wedding arrangement.

Having read the letter through once, Lady Constantine flung it aside with a vigour that shook the decaying old floor and casement. Its contents produced perturbation, misgiving, but not retreat. The deep glow of enchantment shed by the idea of a private union with her beautiful young lover killed the pale light of cold reasoning from an indifferently good relative.

"Oh, no," she murmured, as she sat, covering her face with her hand. "Not for wealth untold could I give him up now!"

No argument, short of Apollo in person from the clouds, would have influenced her. She made her preparations for departure as if nothing had intervened.

CHAPTER III.

In her days of prosperity Lady Constantine had often gone to the remote and populous city of Pumpminster, either frivolously, for shopping purposes, or musico-religiously, to attend choir festivals in the abbey; so there was nothing surprising in her reverting to an old practice. That the journey might appear to be of a somewhat similar nature, she took with her the servant who had been accustomed to accompany her on former occasions, though the woman, having now left her service, and settled in the village as the wife of Anthony Green, with a young child on her hands, could

with some difficulty leave home. Lady Constantine overcame the anxious mother's scruples by providing that young Green should be well cared for; and knowing that she could count upon this woman's fidelity, if upon anybody's, in case of an accident (for it was chiefly Lady Constantine's exertions that had made an honest wife of Mrs. Green), she departed for a fortnight's absence.

The next day found mistress and maid settled in lodgings in an old plum-coloured brick street, which a hundred years ago could boast of rank and fashion among its residents, though now the broad fan-light over each broad door admitted the sun only to the halls of a lodging-house keeper. The lamp-posts were still those that had done duty with oil lights; and rheumatic old coachmen and postilions, that once had driven and ridden gloriously from London

to Land's End, ornamented with their bent persons and bow legs the pavement in front of the chief inn, in the sorry hope of earning sixpence to keep body and soul together.

"We are kept well informed on the time o' day, my lady," said Mrs. Green, as she pulled down the blinds in Lady Constantine's room, on the evening of their arrival. "There's a church exactly at the back of us, and I hear every hour strike."

Lady Constantine said she had noticed that there was a church quite near.

"Well, it is better to have that at the back than other folks' winders. And if your ladyship wants to go there, it won't be far to walk."

"That's what occurred to me," said Lady Constantine, "*if* I should want to go."

During the ensuing days she felt to the

utmost the tediousness of waiting merely that time might pass. Not a soul knew her there, and she knew not a soul, a circumstance which, while it added to her sense of secrecy, intensified her solitude. Occasionally she went to a shop, with Green as her companion. Though there were purchases to be made, they were by no means of a pressing nature, and but poorly filled up the vacancies of those strange, speculative days,—days surrounded by a mist of fear, yet poetized by sweet expectation.

On the fourteenth day she told Green that she was going out for a walk, and, leaving the house, she passed by the obscurest streets to the abbey, where, wandering about beneath the aisles till her courage was screwed to its highest, she went out at the other side, and, looking timidly round to see if anybody followed,

walked on till she came to a certain door, which she reached just at the moment when her heart began to sink to its very lowest, rendering all the screwing up in vain.

Whether it was because the month was October, or from any other reason, the deserted aspect of the quarter in general sat specially on this building. Moreover, the pavement was up, and heaps of stone and gravel obstructed the footway. Nobody was coming, nobody was going, in that thoroughfare: she appeared to be the single one of the human race bent upon marriage business, which seemed to have been unanimously abandoned by all the rest of the world as proven folly. But she thought of Swithin, his blonde hair, ardent eyes, and eloquent lips, and was carried onward by the very reflection.

Entering the surrogate's room, Lady

Constantine managed, at the last juncture, to state her errand in tones so collected as to startle even herself; to which her listener replied also as if the whole thing were the most natural in the world. When it came to the affirmation that she had lived fifteen days in the parish, she said with dismay,—

"Oh, no! I thought the fifteen days meant the interval of residence before the marriage takes place. I have lived here only fourteen days and a half. Now I must come again!"

"Oh—well—I think you need not be so particular," said the surrogate. "As a matter of fact, though the letter of the law requires fifteen days' residence, many people make five sufficient. The provision is inserted, as you doubtless are aware, to hinder runaway marriages as much as possible, and secret unions, and other such

objectionable practices. You need not come again."

That evening Lady Constantine wrote to Swithin St. Cleeve the last letter of the fortnight:—

"My Dearest,—Do come to me as soon as you can. By a sort of favouring blunder I have been able to shorten the time of waiting by a day. Come at once, for I am almost broken down with apprehension. It seems rather rash at moments, all this, and I wish you were here to reassure me. I did not know I should feel so alarmed. I am frightened at every footstep, and dread lest anybody who knows me should accost me, and find out why I am here. I sometimes wonder how I could have agreed to come and enact your part, but I did not realize how trying it would be. You ought not to have asked me, Swithin; upon my

word, it was too cruel of you, and I will punish you for it when you come! But I won't upbraid. I hope the homestead is repaired that has cost me all this sacrifice of modesty. If it were anybody in the world but *you* in question, I would rush home, without waiting here for the end of it,—I really think I would! But, dearest, no. I must show my strength now, or let it be for ever hid. The barriers of ceremony are broken down between us, and it is for the best that I am here."

And yet, at no point of this trying prelude need Lady Constantine have feared for her strength. Deeds in this connexion demand the particular kind of courage that such perfervid women are endowed with, the courage of their emotions, in which young men are often lamentably deficient. Her fear was, in truth, the fear of being

discovered in an unwonted position; not of the act itself. And though her letter was in its way a true exposition of her feeling, had it been necessary to go through the whole Pumpminster process over again, she would have been found equal to the emergency.

It had been for some days a point of anxiety with her what to do with Green during the morning of the wedding. Chance unexpectedly helped her in this difficulty. The day before the purchase of the licence, Green came to Lady Constantine with a letter in her hand from her husband, Anthony, her face as long as a fiddle.

"I hope there's nothing the matter?" said Lady Constantine.

"The child's took bad, my lady!" said Mrs. Green, with suspended floods of water in her eyes. "I love the child better than

I shall love all them that's coming put together; for he's been a good boy to his mother ever since twelve weeks afore he was born! 'Twas he, a tender deary, that made Anthony marry me, and thereby turned hisself from a little calamity to a little blessing! For the man were a backward man in the church part o' matrimony, my lady; though he'll do anything when he's forced a bit by his manly feelings. And now to lose the child—hoo-hoo-hoo! What shall I doo!"

"Well, you want to go home at once, I suppose?"

Mrs. Green explained, between her sobs, that such was her desire; and though this was a day or two sooner than her mistress had wished to be left alone, she consented to Green's departure. So, during the afternoon, her woman went off, with directions to prepare for Lady Constantine's

return in two or three days. But as the exact day of her return was uncertain, no carriage was to be sent to the station to meet her, her intention being to hire one from the hotel.

Lady Constantine was now left in utter solitude to await her lover's arrival.

CHAPTER IV.

A MORE beautiful October morning than that of the next day never beamed into the Welland valleys. The yearly dissolution of leafage was setting in apace. The foliage of the park trees rapidly resolved itself into the multitude of complexions which mark the subtle grades of decay, reflecting wet lights of such innumerable hues that it was a wonder to think their beauties only a repetition of scenes that had been exhibited there on scores of previous Octobers, and had been allowed to pass away without a single dirge from the imperturbable beings who

walked among them. Far in the shadows semi-opaque screens of blue haze made mysteries of the commonest gravel-pit, dingle, or recess.

The wooden cabin at the foot of Rings-Hill Speer had been furnished by Swithin as a sitting and sleeping apartment, some little while before this time; for he had found it highly convenient, during night observations at the top of the column, to remain on the spot all night, not to disturb his grandmother by passing in and out of the house, and to save himself the labour of incessantly crossing the field.

He would much have liked to tell her the secret, and, had it been his own to tell, would probably have done so; but sharing it with an objector who knew not his grandmother's affection so well as he did himself, there was no alternative to holding his

tongue. The more effectually to guard it he decided to sleep at the cabin during the two or three nights previous to his departure, leaving word at the homestead that in a day or two he was going on an excursion.

It was very necessary to start early. Long before the great eye of the sun was lifted high enough to glance into the Welland valley, St. Cleeve arose from his bed in the cabin and prepared to depart, cooking his breakfast upon a little stove in the corner. The young rabbits littered during the foregoing summer watched his preparations through the open door from the grey dawn without, as he bustled, half dressed, in and out under the boughs, and among the blackberries and brambles that grew around.

It was a strange place for a bridegroom to perform his toilet in, but, considering the unconventional nature of the marriage,

a not inappropriate one. What events had been enacted in that earthen camp since it was first thrown up, nobody could say; but the primitive simplicity of the young man's preparations accorded well with the prehistoric spot on which they were made. Embedded under his feet were possibly even now rude trinkets that had been worn at bridal ceremonies of the early inhabitants. Little signified those ceremonies to-day, or the happiness or otherwise of the contracting parties. That his own rite, nevertheless, signified much, was the inconsequent reasoning of Swithin, as it is of many another bridegroom besides; and he, like the rest, went on with his preparations in that mood which sees in his stale repetition the wondrous possibilities of an untried move.

Then through the wet cobwebs, that hung like movable diaphragms on each blade and

bough, he pushed his way down to the furrow which led from the secluded fir-tree island to the wide world beyond the field.

He was not a stranger to enterprise, and still less to the contemplation of enterprise; but an enterprise such as this, dictated by the grand passion, he had never even outlined. That his dear lady was troubled at the situation he had placed her in by not going himself on that errand he could see from her letter; but believing an immediate marriage with her to be the true way of restoring to both that equanimity necessary to serene philosophy, he held it of little account how the marriage was brought about, and happily began his journey towards her place of sojourn.

Passing through a little copse before leaving the parish, the smoke from the newly lit fires of which rose like the stems

of blue trees out of the few cottage chimneys, he heard a quick, familiar foot-step in the path ahead of him, and, turning the corner of the bushes, confronted the foot-post on his way to Welland. In answer to St. Cleeve's inquiry if there was anything for himself, the postman handed out one letter, and proceeded on his route.

Swithin opened and read the letter as he walked, till it brought him to a standstill by the sheer weight of its contents.

They were enough to agitate a more phlegmatic youth than he. He leant over the wicket which came in his path, and endeavoured to comprehend the sense of the whole.

The large long envelope contained, first, a letter from a solicitor in a northern town, informing him that his paternal great-uncle, who had recently returned from the Cape

(whither he had gone in an attempt to repair a broken constitution), was now dead and buried. This great-uncle's name was like a new creation to Swithin. He had held no communication with the young man's branch of the family for innumerable years,—never, in fact, since the marriage of Swithin's father with the simple daughter of Welland Farm. He had been a bachelor to the end of his life, and amassed a fairly good professional fortune by a long and extensive medical practice in the smoky, dreary manufacturing town in which he had lived and died. Swithin had always been taught to think of him as the embodiment of all that was unpleasant in man. He was narrow, sarcastic, and shrewd to unseemliness. That very shrewdness had enabled him, without much professional profundity, to establish his large and lucrative connexion, which lay almost entirely among a class

who neither looked nor cared for drawing-room courtesies.

However, what Dr. St. Cleeve had been as a practitioner matters little. He was now dead, and the bulk of his property had been left to persons with whom this story has nothing to do. But Swithin was informed that out of it there was a bequest of 400*l.* a year to himself,—payment of which was to begin with his twenty-first year, and continue for his life, unless he should marry before reaching the age of twenty-five. In the latter precocious and objectionable event his annuity would be forfeited. The accompanying letter, said the solicitor, would explain all.

This, the second letter, was from his uncle to himself, written about a month before the former's death, and deposited with his will, to be forwarded to his nephew when that event should have taken place. Swithin read, with the solemnity

that such posthumous epistles inspire, the following words from one who, during life, had never once addressed him:—

"Dear Nephew,—You will doubtless experience some astonishment at receiving a communication from one whom you have never personally known, and who, when this comes into your hands, will be beyond the reach of your knowledge. Perhaps I am the loser by this life-long mutual ignorance. Perhaps I am much to blame for it; perhaps not. But such reflections are profitless at this date: I have written with quite other views than to work up a sentimental regret on such an amazingly remote hypothesis as that the fact of a particular pair of people not meeting, among the millions of other pairs of people who have never met, is a great calamity either to the world in general or to themselves.

"The occasion of my addressing you is briefly this: Nine months ago a report casually reached me that your scientific studies were pursued by you with great ability, and that you were a young man of some promise as an astronomer. My own scientific proclivities rendered the report more interesting than it might otherwise have been to me; and it came upon me quite as a surprise that any issue of your father's marriage should have so much in him, or you might have seen more of me in former years than you are ever likely to do now. My health had then begun to fail, and I was starting for the Cape, or I should have come myself to inquire into your condition and prospects. I did not return till six months later, and as my health had not improved, I sent a trusty friend to examine into your life, pursuits, and circumstances, without your own knowledge, and

to report his observations to me. This he did. Through him I learnt, of favourable news:—

"(1) That you worked assiduously at the science of astronomy.

"(2) That everything was auspicious in the career you had chosen.

"Of unfavourable news:—

"(1) That the small income at your command, even when eked out by the sum to which you would be entitled on your grandmother's death and the freehold of the homestead, would be inadequate to support you becomingly as a scientific man, whose lines of work were of a nature not calculated to produce emoluments for many years, if ever.

"(2) That there was something in your path worse than narrow means, and that that something was *a woman*.

"To save you, if possible, from ruin on

these heads, I take the preventive measures detailed below.

"The chief step is, as my solicitor will have informed you, that the sum of 400*l.* a year be settled on you for life, provided you do not marry before reaching the age of twenty-five,—the annuity to begin immediately after you reach the age of twenty-one—and, *vice versâ*, that if you do marry before reaching that age you will receive nothing thenceforward.

"One object of my bequest is that you may have resources sufficient to enable you to travel and study the Southern constellations. When at the Cape, after hearing of your pursuits, I was much struck with the importance of those constellations to an astronomer just pushing into notice. There is more to be made of the Southern hemisphere than ever has been made of it yet; the mine is not so thoroughly worked

as the Northern, and thither your studies should tend.

"The only other preventive step in my power is that of exhortation, at which I am not an adept. Nevertheless, I say to you, Swithin St. Cleeve, don't make a fool of yourself, as your father did. If your studies are to be worth anything, believe me, they must be carried on without the help of a woman. Avoid her, and every one of the sex, if you mean to achieve any worthy thing. Eschew all of that sort for many a year yet. Moreover, I say, the lady of your acquaintance avoid in particular. I have heard nothing against her moral character hitherto; I have no doubt it has been excellent. She may have many good qualities, both of heart and of mind. But she has, in addition to her original disqualification as a companion for you (that is, that of sex) these two serious draw-

backs: she is much older than yourself—"

"*Much* older!" said Swithin resentfully.

"—and she is so impoverished that the title she derives from her late husband is a positive objection. Beyond this, frankly, I don't think well of her. I don't think well of any woman who dotes upon a man younger than herself. To care to be the first fancy of a young fellow like you shows no great common sense in her. If she were worth her salt, she would have too much pride to be intimate with a youth in your unassured position, to say no worse. She is old enough to know that a *liaison* with her may, and almost certainly would, be your ruin; and, on the other hand, that a marriage would be preposterous,—unless she is a complete goose, and in that case there is even more reason for

avoiding her than if she were in her few senses.

"A woman of honourable feeling, nephew, would be careful to do nothing to hinder you in your career, as this putting of herself in your way most certainly will. Yet I hear that she professes a great anxiety on this same future of yours as a physicist. The best way in which she can show the reality of her anxiety is by leaving you to yourself. Perhaps she persuades herself that she is doing you no harm. Well, let her have the benefit of the possible belief; but depend upon it that in truth she gives the lie to her conscience by maintaining such a transparent fallacy. Women's brains are not formed for assisting at any profound science: they lack the power to see things except in the concrete. She'll blab your most secret plans and theories to every one of her acquaintance—"

"She's got none!" said Swithin, beginning to get warm.

"—and make them appear ridiculous by announcing them before they are matured. If you attempt to study with a woman, you'll be ruled by her to entertain fancies instead of theories, air-castles instead of intentions, qualms instead of opinions, sickly prepossessions instead of reasoned conclusions. Your wide heaven of study, young man, will soon reduce itself to the miserable narrow expanse of her face, and your myriad of stars to her two trumpery eyes.

"A woman waking your passions just at a moment when you are endeavouring to shine intellectually, is like stirring up the mud at the bottom of a clear brook. All your brightness and sparkle are taken away; you become moping and thick-headed; obstructions that before only

brought out your brilliancies, now distort and disfigure you in your dull attempts to surmount them.

"Like a certain philosopher, I would, upon my soul, have all young men from eighteen to twenty-five kept under barrels; seeing how often, in the lack of some such sequestering process, the woman sits down before each as his destiny, and too frequently enervates his purpose, till he abandons the most promising course ever conceived!

"But no more. I now leave your fate in your own hands. Your well-wishing relative,

"JOCELYN ST. CLEEVE,

"Doctor in Medicine."

As coming from a bachelor and hardened misogynist of seventy-two, the opinions herein contained were nothing remarkable; but their practical result in restricting the

sudden endowment of Swithin's researches by conditions which turned the favour into a harassment was, at this unique moment, discomfiting and distracting in the highest degree.

Sensational, however, as the letter was, the passionate intention of the day was not hazarded for more than a few minutes thereby. The truth was, the caution and bribe came too late, too unexpectedly, to be of influence. They were the sort of thing which required fermentation to render them effective. Had St. Cleeve received the exhortation a month earlier; had he been able to run over in his mind, at every wakeful hour of thirty consecutive nights, a private catechism on the possibilities opened up by this annuity, there is no telling what might have been the stress of such a web of perplexity upon him, a young man whose love for celestial physics was

second to none. But to have held before him, at the last moment, the picture of a future advantage that he had never once thought of, or discounted for present staying power, it affected him about as much as the view of horizons shown by sheet-lightning. He saw an immense prospect; it went, and the world was as before.

He caught the train at Warborne, and moved rapidly towards Pumpminster; not precisely in the same key as when he had dressed in the hut at dawn, but, as regarded the mechanical furtherances of the journey, as unhesitating as before.

And with the change of scene even his gloom left him; his bosom's lord sat lightly in his throne. St. Cleeve was not sufficiently in mind of poetical literature to remember that wise poets are accustomed to read that lightness of bosom inversely.

Swithin thought it an omen of good fortune; and as thinking is causing in not a few such cases, he was perhaps, in spite of poets, right.

CHAPTER V.

At the station Lady Constantine appeared, standing expectant; he saw her face from the window of the carriage long before she saw him. He no sooner saw her than he was satisfied to his heart's content with his prize. If his great-uncle had offered him, from the grave, a kingdom instead of her, he would not have accepted it.

Swithin jumped out, and nature never painted in a woman's face more devotion than appeared in my lady's at that moment. To both the situation seemed like a beautiful allegory, not to be examined too closely,

lest its defects of correspondence with real life should be apparent.

They almost feared to shake hands in public, so much depended upon their passing that morning without molestation. A fly was called, and they drove away.

"Take this," she said, handing him a folded paper. "It belongs to you rather than to me."

At crossings, and other occasional pauses, pedestrians turned their faces and looked at the pair (for no reason but that, among so many, there were naturally a few of the sort who have eyes to note what incidents come in their way as they plod on); but the two in the vehicle could not but fear that these innocent beholders had special detective designs on them.

"You look so dreadfully young!" she said with humorous fretfulness, as they drove along (Swithin's cheeks being amaz-

ingly fresh from the morning air). "Do try to appear a little haggard, that the parson mayn't ask us awkward questions!"

Nothing further happened, and they were set down opposite a shop, about fifty yards from the church door, at five minutes to eleven.

"We will dismiss the fly," she said. "It will only attract idlers."

On turning the corner and reaching the church, they found the door ajar; but the building contained only two persons, a man and a woman,—the clerk and his wife, as they learnt. Swithin asked when the clergyman would arrive.

The clerk looked at his watch, and said, "At just on eleven o'clock."

"He ought to be here," said Swithin.

"Yes," replied the clerk, as the hour struck. "The fact is, sir, he is a deppity, and apt to be rather wandering in his wits

as regards time and such like, which hev stood in the way of the man's getting a benefit. But no doubt he'll come."

"The regular incumbent is away, then?"

"He's gone for his bare pa'son's fortnight,—that's all; and we was forced to put up with a weak-talented man or none. The best men goes into the brewing, or into the shipping now-a-days, you see, sir; doctrines being rather shaddery at present, and your money's worth not sure in that line. Sowe church officers be left poorly provided with men for odd jobs. I'll tell ye what, sir; I think I'd better run round to the gentleman's lodgings, and try to find him?"

"Pray do," said Lady Constantine.

The clerk left the church; his wife busied herself with dusting at the further end, and Swithin and Viviette were left to themselves. The imagination travels so

rapidly, and a woman's forethought is so assumptive, that the clerk's departure had no sooner doomed them to inaction than it was borne in upon Lady Constantine's mind that she would not become the wife of Swithin St. Cleeve, either to-day or on any other day. Her divinations were continually misleading her, she knew; but a hitch at the moment of marriage surely had a meaning in it.

"Ah,—the marriage is not to be!" she said to herself. "This is a fatality."

It was twenty minutes past, and no parson had arrived. Swithin took her hand.

"If it cannot be to-day, it can be to-morrow," he whispered.

"I cannot say," she answered. "Something tells me *no*."

It was almost impossible that she could know anything of the deterrent force exer-

cised on Swithin by his dead uncle that morning. Yet her manner tallied so curiously well with such knowledge that he was struck by it, and remained silent.

"You have a black tie," she continued, looking at him.

"Yes," replied Swithin. "I bought it on my way here."

"Why could it not have been less sombre in colour?"

"My great-uncle is dead."

"You had a great uncle? You never told me."

"I never saw him in my life. I have only heard about him since his death."

He spoke in as quiet and measured a way as he could, but his heart was sinking. She would go on questioning; he could not tell her an untruth. She would discover particulars of that great-uncle's provision for him, which he, Swithin, was throwing

away for her sake, and she would refuse to be his for his own sake. His conclusion at this moment was precisely what hers had been five minutes sooner: they were never to be husband and wife.

But she did not continue her questions, for the simplest of all reasons: hasty footsteps were audible in the entrance, and the parson was seen coming up the aisle, the clerk behind him wiping the beads of perspiration from his face. The somewhat sorry clerical specimen shook hands with them, and entered the vestry; and the clerk came up and opened the book.

"The poor gentleman's memory is a bit topsy-turvy," whispered the latter. "He had got it in his mind that 'twere a funeral, and I found him wandering about the cemetery a-looking for us. However, all's well as ends well." And the clerk wiped his forehead again.

"How ill-omened!" murmured Viviette.

But the parson came out robed at this moment, and the clerk put on his ecclesiastical countenance and looked in his book. Lady Constantine's momentary languor passed; her blood resumed its courses with a new spring. The grave utterances of the church then rolled out upon the palpitating pair, and no couple ever joined their whispers thereto with more fervency than they.

Lady Constantine (as she for some time continued to be called by the outside world, and may therefore be still called here) had told Green that she might be expected at Welland in a day, or two, or three, as circumstances should dictate. Though the time of return was thus left open, it was deemed advisable, by both Swithin and herself, that her journey back should not be deferred after the next day, in case any

suspicions might be aroused. As for St. Cleeve, his comings and goings were of no consequence. It was seldom known whether he was at home or abroad, by reason of his frequent seclusion at the column.

Late in the afternoon of the next day he accompanied her to the Pumpminster station, intending himself to remain in that city till the following morning. But when a man or youth has such a tender article on his hands as a thirty-hour bride, it is hardly in the power of his strongest reason to set her down at a railway, and send her off like a superfluous portmanteau. Hence the experiment of parting so soon after their union proved excruciatingly severe to these. The evening was dull; the breeze of autumn crept fitfully through every slit and aperture in the town; not a soul in the world seemed to notice or care about anything they did. Lady Con-

stantine sighed; and there was no resisting it,—he could not leave her thus. He decided to get into the train with her, and keep her company for at least a few stations on her way.

It drew on to be a dark night, and, seeing that there was no serious risk after all, he prolonged his journey with her so far as to the junction at which the branch line to Warborne forked off. Here it was necessary to wait a few minutes, before either he could go back or she could go on. They wandered outside the station doorway into the gloom of the road, and there agreed to part.

While she yet stood holding his arm a phaeton sped towards the station entrance, where, in ascending the slope to the door, the horse suddenly jibbed. The gentleman who was driving, being either impatient, or possessed of a theory that all jibbers

may be started by severe whipping because that plan had answered with one in fifty, applied the lash; as a result of it, the horse thrust round the carriage to where they stood, and the end of the driver's sweeping whip cut across Lady Constantine's face with such severity as to cause her an involuntary cry. Swithin turned her round to the lamplight, and discerned a streak of blood on her cheek.

By this time the gentleman who had done the mischief, with many words of regret, had given the reins to his man and dismounted.

"I will go to the waiting-room for a moment," whispered Viviette hurriedly; and, loosing her hand from his arm, she pulled down her veil and vanished inside the building.

The stranger came forward and raised his hat. He was a slightly built and

apparently town-bred man of twenty-eight or thirty; his manner of address was at once careless and conciliatory.

"I am greatly concerned at what I have done," he said. "I sincerely trust that your wife"—but observing the youthfulness of Swithin, he withdrew the word suggested by the manner of Swithin towards Lady Constantine—"I trust the young lady was not seriously cut?"

"I trust not," said Swithin, with some vexation.

"Where did the lash touch her?"

"Straight down her cheek."

"Do let me go to her, and learn how she is, and humbly apologize."

"I'll inquire."

He went to the ladies' room, in which Viviette had taken refuge. She met him at the door, her handkerchief to her cheek, and Swithin explained that the

driver of the phaeton had sent to make inquiries.

"I cannot see him!" she whispered. "He is my brother Louis! He is, no doubt, going on by the train to my house. Don't let him recognize me! We must wait till he is gone."

Swithin thereupon went out again, and told the young man that the cut on her face was not serious, but that she could not see him; after which they parted. St. Cleeve then heard him ask for a ticket for Warborne, which confirmed Lady Constantine's view that he was going on to her house. When the branch train had moved off, Swithin returned to his bride, who waited in a trembling state within.

"Is he gone?" she asked; and on being informed that he had departed, showed herself much relieved.

"Where does your brother come from?" said Swithin.

"From London, immediately. Rio before that. He has a friend or two in this neighbourhood, and visits here occasionally. I have seldom or never spoken to you of him, because of his long absence."

"Is he going to settle near you?"

"No, nor anywhere, I fear. He is, or rather was, in the diplomatic service. He was first a clerk in the foreign office, and was afterwards appointed attaché at Rio Janeiro. But he has resigned the appointment. I wish he had not."

"Why did he resign?"

"He complained of the banishment, and the climate, and everything that people complain of who are determined to be dissatisfied,—though, poor fellow, there is some ground for his complaints. Perhaps some people would say that he is idle.

But he is scarcely that; he is rather restless than idle, so that he never persists in anything. Yet if a subject takes his fancy he will follow it up with exemplary patience till something diverts him."

"He is not kind to you, is he, dearest?"

"Why do you think that?"

"Your manner seems to say so."

"Well, he may not always be kind. But look at my face; does the mark show?"

A streak, straight as a meridian, was visible down her cheek. The blood had been brought almost to the surface, but was not quite through, that which had originally appeared thereon having possibly come from the horse. It signified that to-morrow the red line would be a black one.

Swithin informed her that her brother had taken a ticket for Warborne, and she

at once perceived that he was going on to visit her at Welland, though from his letter she had not expected him so soon by a few days. "Meanwhile," continued Swithin, "you can now get home only by the late train, having missed that one."

"But, Swithin, don't you see my new trouble? If I go to Welland House to-night, and find my brother just arrived there, and he sees this cut on my face, —which I suppose you described to him—"

"I did."

"He will know I was the lady with you!"

"Whom he called my wife. I wonder why we look husband and wife already!"

"Then what am I to do? For the ensuing three or four days I bear in my face a clue to his discovery of our secret."

"Then you must not be seen. We must stay at an inn here."

"Oh, no!" she said timidly. "It is too near home to be quite safe. We might not be known; but *if* we were!"

"We can't go back to Pumpminster now. I'll tell you, dear Viviette, what we must do. We'll go on to Warborne in separate carriages; we'll meet outside the station; thence we'll walk to the column in the dark, and I'll keep you a captive in the cabin, till the scar has disappeared."

As there was nothing which better recommended itself, this course was decided on; and after taking from her trunk the articles that might be required for an incarceration of two or three days, they left the said trunk at the cloak-room, and went on by the last train, which reached Warborne about ten o'clock.

It was only necessary for Lady Constan-

tine to cover her face with the thick veil that she had provided for this escapade, to walk out of the station without fear of recognition. St. Cleeve came forth from another compartment, and they did not rejoin each other till they had reached a shadowy bend in the old turnpike road, beyond the irradiation of the Warborne lamplight.

The walk to Welland was long. It was the walk which Swithin had taken in the rain when he had learnt the fatal forestallment of his stellar discovery; but now he was moved by a less desperate mood, and blamed neither God nor man. They were not pressed for time, and passed along the silent, lonely way with that sense rather of predestination than of choice in their proceedings which the presence of night sometimes imparts. Reaching the park gate, they found it open, and from this

they inferred that her brother Louis had arrived.

Leaving the house and park on their right, they traced the highway yet a little further, and, plunging through the stubble of the opposite field, drew near the isolated earthwork bearing the plantation and tower, which together rose like a flattened dome and lantern from the lighter-hued plain of stubble. It was far too dark to distinguish firs from other trees by the eye alone, but the peculiar dialect of sylvan language which the piny conclave used would have been enough to proclaim their quality at any time. In the lovers' stealthy progress up the slopes a dry stick here and there snapped beneath their feet, seeming like a shot of alarm.

On being unlocked, the hut was found precisely as Swithin had left it two days before. Lady Constantine was thoroughly

wearied, and sat down, while he gathered a handful of twigs and spikelets from the masses strewn without, and lit a small fire, first taking the precaution to blind the little window and re-lock the door.

Lady Constantine looked curiously around by the light of the blaze. The hut was small as the prophet's chamber provided by the Shunamite: in one corner stood the stove, with a little table and chair, a small cupboard hard by, a pitcher of water, a rack overhead, with various articles, including a kettle and gridiron; while the other end of the room was fitted out as a dormitory, for Swithin's use during late observations in the tower overhead.

"It is not much of a palace to offer you," he remarked, smiling. "But at any rate, it is a refuge."

The cheerful firelight dispersed in some

measure Lady Constantine's anxieties. "If we only had something to eat!" she said.

"Dear me," cried St. Cleeve, blankly. "That's a thing I never thought of."

"Nor I, till now," she replied.

He reflected with misgiving.

"Beyond a small loaf of bread in the cupboard, I have nothing. However, just outside the door there are lots of those little rabbits, about the size of rats, that the keepers call runners. And they are as tame as possible. But I fear I could not catch one now. Yet, dear Viviette, wait a minute; I'll try. You must not be starved."

He softly let himself out, and was gone some time. When he reappeared, he produced, not a rabbit, but four sparrows and a thrush.

"I could do nothing in the way of a

rabbit without setting a wire," he said. "But I have managed to get these by knowing where they roost."

He showed her how to prepare the birds, and, having set her to roast them by the fire, departed with the pitcher, to replenish it at the brook which flowed near the homestead in the neighbouring Bottom.

"They are all asleep at my grandmother's," he informed her, when he re-entered, panting, with the dripping pitcher. "They imagine me to be a hundred miles off."

The birds were now ready, and the table was spread. With this fare, eked out by dry toast from the loaf, and moistened with cups of water from the pitcher, to which Swithin added a little wine from the flask he had carried on his journey, they were forced to be content for their supper.

CHAPTER VI.

When Lady Constantine awoke the next morning Swithin was nowhere to be seen. Before she was quite ready for breakfast she heard the key turn in the door, and felt startled, till she remembered that the comer could hardly be anybody but he. He brought a basket with provisions, an extra cup-and-saucer, and so on. In a short space of time the kettle began singing on the stove, and the morning meal was ready.

The sweet resinous air from the firs blew in upon them, as they sat at breakfast; the birds hopped round the door (which, some-

what riskily, they ventured to keep open); and at their elbow rose the tall, lank column into an upper realm of sunlight, which only reached the cabin in fitful darts and flashes through the trees.

"I could be happy here for ever," said she, clasping his hand. "I wish I could never see my great gloomy house again, since I am not rich enough to throw it open, and live there as I ought to do. Poverty of this sort is not unpleasant at any rate. What are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking about my outing this morning. On reaching my grandmother's, she was only a little surprised to see me. I was obliged to breakfast there, or appear to do so, to divert suspicion; and this food is supposed to be wanted for my dinner and supper. There will of course be no difficulty in my obtaining an ample supply for any length of time, as I can take what

I like from the buttery without observation. But as I looked in my grandmother's face this morning, and saw her looking affectionately in mine, and thought how she had never concealed anything from me, and had always had my welfare at heart, I felt—that I should like to tell her what we have done."

"Oh, no,—please not, Swithin!" she exclaimed piteously.

"Very well," he answered. "On no consideration will I do so without your assent." And no more was said on the matter.

The morning was passed in applying wet rag and other remedies to the purple line on Viviette's cheek; and in the afternoon they sat up the equatorial under the replaced dome, to have it in order for night observations.

The evening was clear, dry, and remark-

ably cold by comparison with the daytime weather. After a frugal supper, they replenished the stove with charcoal from the homestead, which they also burnt during the day,—an idea of Viviette's, that the smoke from a wood fire might not be seen more frequently than was consistent with the occasional occupation of the cabin by Swithin, as heretofore.

At eight o'clock she insisted upon his ascending the tower for observations, in strict pursuance of the idea on which their marriage had been based, namely, that of restoring regularity to his studies.

The sky had a new and startling beauty that night. A broad, fluctuating, semicircular arch of vivid white light spanned the northern quarter of the heavens, reaching from the horizon to the star Eta in the Greater Bear. It was the Aurora Borealis, just risen up for the winter season

out of the freezing seas of the north, where every autumn vapour was now undergoing rapid congelation.

"Oh, let us sit and look at it!" she said; and they turned their backs upon the equatorial and the southern glories of the heavens to this new beauty in a quarter which they seldom contemplated.

The lustre of the fixed stars was diminished to a sort of blueness. Little by little the arch grew higher against the dark void, like the form of the spirit-maiden in the shades of Glenfinlas, till its crown drew near the zenith, and threw a tissue over the whole waggon and horses of the great northern constellation. Brilliant shafts radiated from the convexity of the arch, coming and going silently. The temperature fell, and Lady Constantine drew her wrap more closely around her.

"We'll go down," said Swithin. "The

cabin is beautifully warm. Why should we try to observe to-night? Indeed, we cannot; the Aurora light overpowers everything."

"Very well. To-morrow night there will be no interruption. I shall be gone."

"You leave me to-morrow, Viviette?"

"Yes; to-morrow morning."

The truth was that with the progress of the hours and days, the conviction had been borne in upon Viviette more and more forcibly that not for kingdoms and principalities could she afford to risk the discovery of her presence here by any living soul.

"But let me see your face, dearest," he said. "I don't think it will be safe for you to meet your brother yet."

As it was too dark to see her face on the summit where they sat, they descended the winding staircase; and in the cabin Swithin

examined the damaged cheek. The line, though so far attenuated as not to be observable by any one but a close observer, had not quite disappeared. But in consequence of her reiterated and almost tearful anxiety to go, and as there was a strong probability that her brother had left the house, Swithin decided to call at Welland next morning, and reconnoitre with a view to her return.

Locking her in, he crossed the dewy stubble into the park. The house was silent and deserted; and only one tall stalk of smoke ascended from the chimneys. Notwithstanding that the hour was hardly nine, he knocked at the door.

"Is Lady Constantine at home?" asked Swithin, with a disingenuousness now habitual, yet unknown to him six months before

"No, Mr. St. Cleeve; my lady has not

returned from Pumpminster. We expect her every day."

"Nobody staying in the house?"

"My lady's brother has been here; but he is gone on to Budmouth. He will come again in two or three weeks, I understand."

This was enough. Swithin said he would call again, and returned to the cabin, where, waking Viviette, who was not by nature an early riser, he waited on the column till she was ready to breakfast. When this had been shared they prepared to start.

A long walk was before them. Warborne station lay five miles distant, and the next station above that nine miles. They were bound for the latter; their plan being that she should there take the train to Filton Junction (where the whip accident had occurred), claim her luggage and return

with it to Warborne, as if from Pumpminster.

The morning was cool and the walk not wearisome. When once they had left behind the stubble-field of their environment and the parish of Welland, they sauntered on comfortably, Lady Constantine's spirits rising as she withdrew further from danger.

They parted by a little brook, about half a mile from the station; Swithin to return to Welland by the way he had come.

Lady Constantine telegraphed from Filton to Warborne for a carriage to be in readiness to meet her on her arrival; and then, waiting for the down train, she travelled smoothly home, reaching Welland House about five minutes sooner than Swithin reached the column hard by, after footing it all the way from where they had parted.

CHAPTER VII.

From that day forward their life resumed its old channel in general outward aspect.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature in their romantic exploit was its comparative effectiveness as an expedient for the end designed,—that of restoring calm assiduity to the studies of these astronomers. Swithin took up his old position as the lonely philosopher at the column, and Lady Constantine lapsed back to immured existence at the house, with apparently not a friend in the parish. The enforced narrowness of life which her limited resources necessitated was now an additional

safeguard against the discovery of her relations with St. Cleeve. Her neighbours seldom troubled her; as much, it must be owned, from a tacit understanding that she was not in a position to return invitations as from any selfish coldness engendered by her want of wealth.

At the first meeting of the secretly united pair after their short honeymoon, they were compelled to behave as strangers to each other. It occurred in the only part of Welland which deserved the name of a village street, and all the labourers were returning to their midday meal, with those of their wives who assisted at out-door work. Before the eyes of this innocent though quite untrustworthy group, Swithin and his Viviette could only shake hands in passing, though she contrived to say to him in an undertone, "My brother does not return yet for some time. He has

gone to Paris. I will be on the lawn this evening, if you can come." It was a fluttered smile that she bestowed on him, and there was no doubt that every fibre of her heart vibrated afresh at meeting, with such reserve, one who stood in his close relation to her.

The shades of night fell early now, and Swithin was at the spot of appointment about the time that he knew her dinner would be over. It was just where they had met at the beginning of the year, but many changes had resulted since then. The flower-beds that had used to be so neatly edged were now jagged and leafy; black stars appeared on the pale surface of the gravel walks, denoting tufts of grass that grew unmolested there. Lady Constantine's external affairs wore just that aspect which suggests that new blood may be advantageously introduced into the

line; and new blood had been introduced, in good sooth,—with what social result remained to be seen.

She silently entered on the scene from the same window which had given her passage in months gone by. They met with a concerted embrace, and St. Cleeve spoke his greeting in whispers.

"We are quite safe, dearest," said she.

"But the servants?"

"My meagre staff consists of only two women and the boy; and they are away in the other wing. I thought you would like to see the inside of my house, after showing me the inside of yours. So we will walk through it instead of staying out here."

She let him in through the casement, and they strolled forward softly, Swithin with some curiosity, never before having gone beyond the library and adjoining

room. The whole western side of the house was at this time shut up, her life being confined to two or three small rooms in the south-east corner. The great apartments through which they now whisperingly walked wore already that funereal aspect that comes from disuse and inattention. Triangular cobwebs already formed little hammocks for the dust in corners of the wainscot, and a close smell of wood and leather, seasoned with mouse-droppings, pervaded the atmosphere. So seldom was the solitude of these chambers intruded on by human feet that more than once a mouse stood and looked the twain in the face from the arm of a sofa, or the top of a cabinet, without any great fear.

Swithin had no residential ambition whatever, but he was interested in the place. "Will the house ever be thrown

open to gaiety, as it was in old times?" said he.

"Not unless you make a fortune," she replied laughingly. "It is mine for my life, as you know; but the estate is so terribly saddled with annuities to Sir Blount's distant relatives, one of whom will succeed me here, that I have practically no more than my own little private income to exist on."

"And are you bound to occupy the house?"

"Yes; that was one of the capricious conditions."

"And was there any stipulation in the event of your remarriage?"

"It was not mentioned."

"It is satisfactory to find that you lose nothing by marrying me, at all events, dear Viviette."

"I hope you lose nothing either, at least, of consequence."

"What have I to lose?"

"I meant your liberty. Suppose you become a popular physicist (popularity seems cooling towards art and coquetting with science now-a-days), and a better chance offers, and one who would make you a newer and brighter wife than I am comes in your way. Will you never regret this? Will you never despise me?"

Swithin answered by a kiss, and they againt went on; proceeding like a couple of burglars, lest they should attract the attention of the cook or Green.

In one of the upper rooms his eyes were attracted by an old chamber organ, which had once been lent for use in the church. He mentioned his recollection of the same, which led her to say, "That reminds me of something! There is to be a confirmation in our parish in the spring, and you once told me that you had never been con-

firmed. What shocking neglect! Why was it?"

"I hardly know. The confusion resulting from my father's death caused it to be forgotten, I suppose."

"Now, dear Swithin, you will do this to please me,—be confirmed on the present occasion?"

"Since I have done without the virtue of it so long, might I not do without it altogether?"

"No, no!" she said earnestly. "I do wish it, indeed. I am made unhappy when I think you don't care about such serious matters. Without the Church to cling to, what have we?"

"Each other. But, seriously, I should be inverting the established order of spiritual things; people ought to be confirmed before they are married."

"That's really of minor consequence.

Now, don't think slightingly of what so many good men have laid down as necessary to be done. And, dear Swithin, I somehow feel that a certain levity which has perhaps shown itself in our treatment of the sacrament of marriage—by making a clandestine adventure of what is, after all, a solemn rite—would be well atoned for by a due seriousness in other points of religious observance. This opportunity should therefore not be passed over. I thought of it all last night; and you are a parson's son, remember, and he would have insisted on it if he had been alive. In short, Swithin, do be a good boy, and observe the Church's ordinances."

Lady Constantine, by virtue of her temperament, was necessarily either lover or *dévote*, and she vibrated so gracefully between these two conditions that nobody who had known the circumstances could

have condemned her inconsistencies. To be led into difficulties by those mastering emotions of hers, to aim at escape by turning round and seizing the apparatus of religion—which could only rightly be worked by those emotions she had already bestowed elsewhere—it was, after all, but Nature's well-meaning attempt to preserve the honour of her daughter's conscience in the trying quandary to which the conditions of sex had given birth. As Viviette could not be confirmed herself, and as Communion Sunday was a long way off, she urged Swithin thus.

"And the new bishop is such a good man," she continued. "I used to have a slight acquaintance with him when he was a parish priest."

"Very well, dearest. To please you I'll be confirmed. My grandmother, too, will be delighted, no doubt."

They continued their ramble; Lady Constantine first advancing into rooms with the candle, to assure herself that all was empty, and then calling him forward in a whisper. The stillness was broken only by these whispers, or by the occasional crack of a floor-board beneath their tread. At last they sat down, and, shading the candle with a screen, she showed him the faded contents of this and that drawer or cabinet, or the wardrobe of some member of the family who had died young early in the century, when muslin reigned supreme, when waists were close to arm-pits, and muffs as large as smugglers' tubs.

These researches among habilimental hulls and husks, whose human kernels had long ago perished, had gone on about half an hour, when the companions were startled by a loud ringing at the front door bell.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Constantine flung down the old-fashioned lace-work, whose beauties she had been pointing out to Swithin, and exclaimed, "Who can it be? Not Louis, surely?"

They listened. An arrival was such a phenomenon at this unfrequented mansion, and particularly a late arrival, that no servant was on the alert to respond to the call; and the visitor rang again, more loudly than before. Sounds of the tardy opening and shutting of a passage-door from the kitchen quarter then reached their ears, and Viviette went into the

corridor to hearken more attentively. In a few minutes she returned to the wardrobe-room in which she had left Swithin.

"Yes; it is my brother!" she said, with difficult composure. "I just caught his voice. He has no doubt come back from Paris to stay. This is a rather vexatious, indolent way he has, never to write to prepare me!"

"I can easily go away," said Swithin.

By this time, however, her brother had been shown into the house, and the footsteps of the page were audible, coming in search of Lady Constantine.

"If you will wait there a moment," she said, directing St. Cleeve into her dressing-room, which adjoined. "You will be quite safe from interruption, and I will quickly come back." Taking the light, she left him.

Swithin waited in darkness. Not more

than ten minutes had passed when a whisper in her voice came through the keyhole. He opened the door.

"Yes; he is come to stay!" she said. "He is at supper now."

"Very well; don't be flurried, dearest. Shall I stay too?"

"Oh, Swithin, I fear not!" she replied anxiously. "You see how it is. To-night we have broken the arrangement that you should never come here; and this is the result. Will it offend you if—I ask you to leave?"

"Not in the least. Upon the whole, I prefer the comfort of my little cabin and homestead to the gauntness and alarms of this place."

"There, now, I fear you are offended!" she said, a tear collecting in her eye. "Would that I were going back with you to the cabin! How happy we were, those

three days of our stay there! But it is better, perhaps, just now, that you should leave me. Yes, these rooms are oppressive. They require a large household to make them cheerful. . . . Yet, Swithin," she added, after reflection, "I will not request you to go. Do as you think best. I will light a night-light, and leave you here to consider. For myself, I must go down-stairs to my brother at once, or he'll wonder what I am doing."

She kindled the little light, and again retreated, closing the door upon him.

Swithin stood and waited some time; till he considered that upon the whole it would be preferable to leave. With this intention he emerged, and went softly along the dark passage towards the extreme end, where there was a little crooked staircase that would conduct him down to a disused side door. Descending this

stair, he duly arrived at the other side of the house, facing the quarter whence the wind blew, and here he was surprised to catch the noise of rain beating against the windows. It was a state of weather which fully accounted for the visitor's impatient ringing.

St. Cleeve was in a minor kind of dilemma. The rain reminded him that his hat and great-coat had been left downstairs, in the front part of the house; and though he might have gone home without either in ordinary weather, it was not a pleasant feat in the pelting winter rain. Retracing his steps to Viviette's room, he took the light, and opened a closet-door that he had seen ajar on his way down. Within the closet hung various articles of apparel, upholstery lumber of all kinds filling the back part. Swithin thought he might find here a cloak of hers

to throw round him, but finally took down from a peg a more suitable garment, the only one of the sort that was there. It was an old moth-eaten great-coat, heavily trimmed with fur; and in removing it a companion cap of sealskin was disclosed.

"Whose can they be?" he thought, and a gloomy answer suggested itself. "Pooh," he then said (summoning the scientific side of his nature), "matter is matter, and mental association only a delusion." Putting on the garments, he returned the light to Lady Constantine's dressing-room, and again prepared to depart as before.

Scarcely, however, had he regained the corridor a second time, when he heard a light footstep—seemingly Viviette's—again on the front landing. Wondering what she wanted with him further, he waited,

taking the precaution to step into the closet till sure it was she.

The figure came onward, bent to the keyhole of the dressing-room door, and whispered, (supposing him still inside), "Swithin, on second thoughts I think you may stay with safety."

Having no further doubt of her personality, he came out with thoughtless abruptness from the closet behind her, and looking round suddenly she beheld his shadowy fur-clad outline. At once she raised her hands in horror, as if to protect herself from him; she uttered a shriek, and turned shudderingly to the wall, covering her face.

Swithin would have picked her up in a moment, but by this time he could hear footsteps rushing upstairs, in response to her cry. In consternation, and entirely with a view of not compromising her, he

effected his retreat as fast as possible, reaching the bend of the corridor just as her brother Louis appeared with a light at the other extremity.

"What's the matter, for heaven's sake, Viviette?" said Louis.

"My husband!" she involuntarily exclaimed.

"What nonsense!"

"Oh, yes, it is nonsense," she added, with an effort. "It was nothing."

"But what was the cause of your cry?"

She had evidently by this time recovered her reason and judgment. "Oh, it was a trick of the imagination," she said, with a faint laugh. "I live so much alone that I get superstitious—and—I thought for the moment I saw an apparition!"

"Of your late husband?"

"Yes. But it was nothing; it was the

outline of the—tall clock and the chair behind. Would you mind going down, and leaving me to go into my room for a moment?"

She entered the bedroom, and her brother went downstairs. Swithin thought it best to leave well alone, and, going noiselessly out of the house, plodded through the rain homeward. It was plain that agitations of one sort and another had so weakened Viviette's nerves as to lay her open to every impression. That the clothes he had borrowed were some cast-off garments of the late Sir Blount had occurred to St. Cleeve in taking them; but in the moment of returning to her side he had forgotten this, and the shape they lent his figure had obviously been a reminder of too sudden a sort for her. Musing thus, he walked along as if he were still, as before, the lonely student, dissociated from

all mankind, and with no shadow of right or interest in Welland House or its mistress.

The great-coat and cap were unpleasant companions; but Swithin having been reared, or having reared himself, in the scientific school of thought, would not, as has been said, give way to his sense of their weirdness. To do so would have been like treason to his own beliefs and aims.

When nearly home, at a point where his track converged on another path, there approached him from the latter a group of indistinct forms. The tones of their speech revealed them to be Hezzy Biles, Nat Chapman, Fry, and other labourers. Swithin was about to say a word to them, till, recollecting his disguise, he deemed it advisable to hold his tongue, lest his attire should tell a too dangerous tale as to where

he had come from. By degrees they drew closer, their walk being in the same direction.

"Good-night, stranger," said Nat.

The stranger did not reply.

All of them paced on abreast of him, and he could perceive in the gloom that their faces were turned inquiringly upon his form. Then a whisper passed from one to another of them; then Chapman, who was the boldest, dropped immediately behind his heels, and followed there for some distance, taking close observations of his outline, after which the men grouped again and whispered. Thinking it best to let them pass on, Swithin slackened his pace, and they went ahead of him, apparently without much reluctance.

There was no doubt that they had been impressed by the clothes he wore; and

having no wish to provoke similar comments from his grandmother and Hannah, Swithin took the precaution, on arriving at Welland Bottom, to enter the homestead by the outhouse. Here he deposited the cap and coat in secure hiding, afterwards going round to the front, and opening the door in the usual way.

In the entry he met Hannah, who said,—

"Only to hear what have been seed to-night, Mr. Swithin! The work-folk have dropped in to tell us!"

In the kitchen were the men who had outstripped him on the road. Their countenances, instead of wearing the usual knotty irregularities, had a smoothed-out expression of blank concern. Swithin's entrance having been unobtrusive and quiet, as if he had merely come down from his study upstairs, they only noticed him

by enlarging their gaze, so as to include him in the audience.

"We was in a deep talk at the moment," continued Blore, "and Nat had just brought up that story about old Jeremiah Paddock's crossing the park one night at one o'clock in the morning, and seeing Sir Blount a-shutting my lady out-o'-doors; and we was saying that it seemed a true return that he should perish in a foreign land; when we happened to look up, and there was Sir Blount a-walking along."

"Did it overtake you, or did you overtake it?" whispered Hannah sepulchrally.

"I don't say 'twas *it*," returned Sammy. "God forbid that I should drag in a resurrection word about what perhaps was still solid manhood, and has to die. But he, or it, closed in upon us, as 'twere."

"Yes, closed in upon us!" said Haymoss.

"And I said 'Good-night, stranger,'" added Chapman.

"Yes, 'Good-night, stranger,'—that wez yer words, Natty. I support ye in it."

"And then he closed in upon us still more."

"We closed in upon he, rather," said Chapman.

"Well, well; 'tis the same thing in these holy matters! And the form was Sir Blount's. My nostrils told me, for—there, 'a smelled. Yes, I could smell 'n, being to leeward."

"Lord, lord, what an unwholesome scandal about the ghost of a respectable gentleman!" said Mrs. Martin, who had entered from the sitting-room.

"Now, wait, ma'am. I don't say 'twere a low smell, mind ye. 'Twere a high smell, a sort of gamey flaviour, calling to mind venison and hare, just as you'd expect of a

great squire,—not like a poor man's 'natomy, at all; and that was what strengthened my faith that 'twas Sir Blount."

("It was the skins that old coat was made of," thought Swithin.)

"Well, well; I've not defied the figure of starvation these five-and-twenty year, on nine shillings a week, to be afeard of a walking vapour, sweet or savoury," said Hezzy. "So here's home-along."

"Bide a bit longer, and I'm going too," continued Fry. "Well, when I found 'twas Sir Blount my spet dried up within me; for neither hedge nor bush were there for refuge against any foul spring 'a might have made at us."

"'Twas very curious; but we had likewise mentioned his name just afore, in talking of the confirmation that's shortly coming on," said Hezzy.

"Is there soon to be a confirmation?"

"Yes. In this parish—the first time in Welland church for twenty years. As I say, I had told 'em that he was confirmed the same year that I went up to have it done, as I have very good cause to mind. When we went to be examined, the pa'son said to me, 'Rehearse the articles of thy belief.' Mr. Blount (as he was then) was nighest me, and he whispered, 'Women and wine.' 'Women and wine,' says I to the pa'son: and for that I was sent back till next confirmation, Sir Blount never owning that he was the rascal."

"Confirmation was a sight different at that time," mused Biles. "The Bishops didn't lay it on so strong then as they do now. Now-a-days, yer Bishop gies both hands to every Jack-rag and Tom-straw that drops the knee afore him; but 'twas six chaps to one blessing when we was

boys. The Bishop o' that time would stretch out his palms and run his fingers over our row of crowns as off-hand as a bank gentleman telling money. The great prophets of the Church in them days wasn't particular to a soul or two more or less; and, for my part, I think living was easier for 't."

"The new Bishop, I hear, is a bachelor-man; or a widow gentleman is it?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Bachelor, I believe, ma'am. Mr. San Cleeve, making so bold, you've never faced him yet, I think?"

Mrs. Martin shook her head.

"No; it was a piece of neglect. I hardly know how it happened," she said.

"I am going to, this time," said Swithin, and turned the chat to other matters.

CHAPTER IX.

SWITHIN could not sleep that night for thinking of his Viviette. Nothing told so significantly of the conduct of her first husband towards the poor lady as the abiding dread of him which was revealed in her by any sudden revival of his image or memory. But for that consideration, her almost childlike terror at Swithin's inadvertent disguise would have been ludicrous.

He waited anxiously through several following days for an opportunity of seeing her, but none was afforded. Her brother's presence in the house sufficiently accounted

for this. At length he ventured to write a note, requesting her to signal to him in a way she had done once or twice before,—by pulling down a blind in a particular window of the house, one of the few visible from the top of the Rings-Hill column; this to be done on any evening before dark, when she could see him after dinner on the terrace.

When he had levelled the glass at that window for five successive nights, he beheld the blind in the position suggested. Three hours later, quite in the dusk, he repaired to the place of appointment.

"My brother is away this evening," she explained, "and that's why I can come out. He is not gone for more than a few hours, nor is he likely to do so just yet. He keeps himself a good deal in my company, which has made it unsafe for me to venture near you."

"Has he any suspicion?"

"None, apparently. But he rather depresses me."

"How, Viviette?" Swithin feared, from her manner, that this was something serious.

"I would rather not tell."

"But— Well, never mind."

"Yes, Swithin, I will tell you. There should be no secrets between us. He urges upon me the necessity of marrying, day after day."

"For money and position, of course."

"Yes. But I take no notice. I let him go on."

"Really, this is sad!" said the young man. "I must work harder than ever, or you will never be able to own me."

"Oh, yes, in good time!" she cheeringly replied.

"I shall be very glad to have you always near me. I felt the gloom of our position

keenly when I was obliged to disappear, that night, without assuring you it was only I who stood there. Why were you so frightened at those old clothes I borrowed?"

"Don't ask,—don't ask!" she said, burying her face on his shoulder. "I don't want to speak of that. There was something so ghastly and so uncanny in your putting on such garments that I wish you had been more thoughtful, and had left them alone."

He assured her that he did not stop to consider whose they were. "By the way, they must be sent back," he said.

"No; I never wish to see them again! I cannot help feeling that your putting them on was ominous."

"Nothing is ominous in serene philosophy," he said, kissing her. "Things are either causes, or they are not causes. When can you see me again?"

In such wise the hour passed away. The evening was typical of others which followed it at irregular intervals through the winter. And during the intenser months of the season, frequent falls of snow lengthened even more than other difficulties had done, the periods of isolation between the pair. Swithin adhered with all the more strictness to the letter of his promise not to intrude into the house, from his sense of her powerlessness to compel him to keep out should he choose to rebel. A student of the greatest forces in nature, he had, like many others of his sort, no personal force to speak of in a social point of view, mainly because he took no interest in human ranks and formulas; and hence he was as docile as a child in her hands wherever matters of that kind were concerned.

Her brother wintered at Welland; but

whether because his experience of tropic climes had unfitted him for the brumal rigours of Britain, or for any other reason, he seldom showed himself out of doors, and Swithin caught but passing glimpses of him. Now and then, Viviette's impulsive kindness would overcome her sense of risk, and she would press Swithin to call on her, at all costs. This he would by no means do. It was obvious to his more logical mind that the secrecy to which they had bound themselves must be kept in its fulness, or might as well be abandoned altogether.

He was now sadly exercised on the subject of his uncle's will. There had as yet been no pressing reasons for a full and candid reply to the solicitor who had communicated with him, owing to the fact that the annuity was not to begin till Swithin was one-and-twenty; but time was going

on, and something definite would have to be done soon. To own to his marriage and consequent disqualification for the bequest was easy in itself; but it involved telling at least one man what both Viviette and himself had great reluctance in telling anybody. Moreover, he wished Viviette to know nothing of his loss in making her his wife. All he could think of doing for the present was to write a postponing letter to his uncle's lawyer, and wait events.

The one comfort of this dreary wintertime was his perception of a returning ability to work with the regularity and much of the spirit of earlier days.

One bright night in April there was an eclipse of the moon, and Mr. Torkingham, by arrangement, brought to the observatory several labouring men and boys, to

whom he had promised a sight of the phenomenon through the telescope. The coming confirmation, fixed for May, was again talked of; and St. Cleeve learned from the parson that the Bishop had arranged to stay the night at the vicarage, and was to be invited to a grand luncheon at Welland House immediately after the ordinance.

This seemed like a going back into life again as regarded the mistress of that house; and St. Cleeve was a little surprised that, in his communications with Viviette, she had mentioned no such probability. The next day he walked round the mansion, wondering how in its present state any entertainment could be given therein.

He found that the shutters had been opened, which had restored an unexpected liveliness to the aspect of the windows.

Two men were putting a chimney-pot on one of the chimney-stacks, and two more were scraping green mould from the front wall. He made no inquiries on that occasion. Three days later he strolled thitherward again. Now a great cleaning of window-panes was going on, Hezzy Biles and Sammy Blore being the operators, for which purpose their services must have been borrowed from the neighbouring farmer. Hezzy dashed water at the glass with a force that threatened to break it in, the broad face of Sammy being discernible inside, smiling at the onset. In addition to them, Anthony Green and another were weeding the gravel walks, and putting fresh plants into the flower beds. Neither of these reasonable operations was a great undertaking, singly looked at; but the life Viviette had latterly led and the mood in which she had hither-

to regarded the premises rendered it somewhat significant. Swithin, however, was rather curious than concerned at the proceedings, and returned to his tower with feelings of interest not entirely confined to the worlds overhead.

Lady Constantine may or may not have seen him from the house; but the same evening, which was fine and dry, while he was occupying himself in the observatory with cleaning the eye-pieces of the equatorial, skull-cap on head, observing-jacket on, and in other ways primed for sweeping, the customary stealthy step on the winding staircase brought her form in due course into the rays of the bull's-eye lantern. The meeting was all the more pleasant to him from being unexpected, and he at once lit up a larger candle in honour of the occasion.

"It is but a hasty visit," she said, when,

after putting up her mouth to be kissed, she had seated herself in the low chair used for observations, panting a little with the labour of ascent. "But I hope to be able to come more freely soon. My brother is still living on with me. Yes, he is going to stay until the confirmation is over. After the confirmation he will certainly leave. So good it is of you, dear, to please me by agreeing to the ceremony. The Bishop, you know, is going to lunch with us. It is a wonder he has agreed to come, for he is a man averse to society, and mostly keeps entirely with the clergy on these confirmation tours, or circuits, or whatever they call them. But Mr. Torkingham's house is so very small, and mine is so close at hand, that this arrangement to relieve him of the fuss of one meal, at least, naturally suggested itself; and the Bishop has fallen

in with it very readily. How are you getting on with your observations? Have you not wanted me dreadfully, to write down notes?"

"Well, I have been obliged to do without you, whether or no. See here,—how much I have done." And he showed her a book ruled in columns, headed "Object," "Right Ascension," "Declination," "Features," "Remarks," and so on.

She looked over this and other things, but her mind speedily winged its way back to the confirmation. "It is so new to me," she said, "to have persons coming to the house, that I feel rather anxious. I hope the luncheon will be a success."

"You know the Bishop?" said Swithin.

"I have not seen him for many years. I knew him when I was quite a girl, and

he held the little living of Puddle-sub-Mixen, near us; but after that time, and ever since I have lived here, I have seen nothing of him. There has been no confirmation in this village, they say, for twenty years. The other bishop used to make the young men and women go to Warborne; he wouldn't take the trouble to come to such an out-of-the-way parish as ours."

"This cleaning and preparation that I observe going on must be rather a tax upon you?"

"My brother Louis sees to it, and, what is more, bears the expense."

"Your brother?" said Swithin, with surprise."

"Well, he insisted on doing so," she replied, in a hesitating, despondent tone. "He has been active in the whole matter, and was the first to suggest

the invitation. I should not have though of it."

"Well, I will hold aloof till it is all over."

"Thanks, dearest, for your considerateness. I wish it was not still advisable! But I shall see you on the day, and watch my own philosopher all through the service from the corner of my pew! . . . I hope you are well prepared for the rite, Swithin?" she added, turning tenderly to him. "It would perhaps be advisable for you to give up this astronomy till the confirmation is over, in order to devote your attention exclusively to that more serious matter."

"More serious! Well, I will do the best I can. I am sorry to see that you are less interested in astronomy than you used to be, Viviette."

"No; it is only that these prepara-

tions for the Bishop unsettle my mind from study. Now put on your other coat and hat, and come with me a little way."

CHAPTER X.

THE morning of the confirmation was come. It was mid-May time, bringing with it weather not, perhaps, quite so blooming as that assumed to be natural to the month by the joyous poets of three hundred years ago; but a very tolerable, well-wearing May, that the average rustic would willingly compound for in lieu of Mays occasionally fairer, but usually more foul.

Among the larger shrubs and flowers which composed the outworks of the Welland gardens, the lilac, the laburnum, and the guelder-rose hung out their re-

spective colours of purple, yellow, and white; whilst within these, belted round from every disturbing gale, rose the columbine, the peony, the larkspur, and the Solomon's seal. The animate things that moved amid this scene of colour were plodding bees, gadding butterflies, and numerous sauntering young feminine candidates for the impending confirmation, who, having gaily bedecked themselves for the ceremony, were enjoying their own appearance by walking about in twos and threes till it was time to start.

Swithin St. Cleeve, whose preparations were somewhat simpler than those of the village belles, waited till his grandmother and Hannah had set out, and then, locking the door, followed towards the distant church. On reaching the church-yard gate he met Mr. Torkingham, who shook hands with him in the manner of a man

with several irons in the fire, and telling Swithin where to sit, disappeared to hunt up some candidates who had not yet made themselves visible.

Casting his eyes round for Viviette, and seeing nothing of her, Swithin went on to the church porch, and looked in. From the north side of the nave smiled a host of girls, gaily uniform in dress, age, and a temporary repression of their natural tendency to "skip like a hare over the meshes of good counsel." Their white muslin dresses, their round white caps, from beneath whose borders hair-knots and curls of various shades of brown, escaped upon their low shoulders, as if against their will, lighted up the black pews and grey stone-work to an unwonted warmth and life. On the south side were the young men and boys,—heavy, angular, and massive, as indeed was rather neces-

sary, considering what they would have to bear at the hands of wind and weather before they returned to that mouldy nave for the last time.

Over the heads of all these he could see into the chancel, to the square pew on the north side, which was attached to Welland House. There he discerned Lady Constantine already arrived, her brother Louis sitting by her side.

Swithin entered, and seated himself at the end of a bench, and she, who had been on the watch, at once showed by subtle signs her consciousness of the presence of the young man who had reversed the ordained sequence of the Church services on her account. She appeared in black attire, though not strictly in mourning, a touch of red in her bonnet setting off the richness of her complexion without making her gay. Handsomest woman in the

church she decidedly was; and yet a disinterested spectator who had known all the circumstances would probably have felt that, the future considered, Swithin's more natural mate would have been one of the muslin-clad maidens who were to be presented to the Bishop with him that day.

When the Bishop had come, and gone into the chancel, and blown his nose, the congregation were sufficiently impressed by his presence to leave off looking at one another.

Twenty years, people said, had elapsed since a bishop had sat in that humble and remote house of prayer. The Right Reverend Cuthbert Helmsdale, D.D., ninety-fourth occupant of the episcopal throne of the diocese, revealed himself to be a dark man in skin as well as hair, whose darkness was thrown still further into prominence by the lawn protuberances that now rose

upon his two shoulders, like the Eastern and Western hemispheres. In stature he seemed to be tall and imposing, but something of this aspect may have been derived from his robes.

The service was, as usual, of a length which severely tried the tarrying powers of the young people assembled; and it was not till the youth of all the other parishes had gone up that the turn came for the Welland bevy. Swithin and some older ones were nearly the last. When, at the heels of Mr. Torkingham, he passed Lady Constantine's pew, he lifted his eyes from the red lining of that gentleman's hood sufficiently high to catch hers. She was abstracted, tearful,—regarding him with all the rapt mingling of religion, love, fervour, and hope which such women can feel at such times, and which men know nothing of. How fervidly she watched

the Bishop place his hand on her beloved youth's head; how she saw the great episcopal ring glistening in the sun among Swithin's brown curls; how she waited to hear if Dr. Helmsdale uttered the form "this thy child" (which he used for the younger ones), or "this thy servant" (which he used for those older); and how, when he said "this thy *child*," she felt a prick of conscience, like a person who had entrapped an innocent youth into marriage, for her own gratification, till she remembered that she had raised his social position thereby,—all this could only have been told in its entirety by herself.

As for Swithin, he felt ashamed of his own utter lack of the high enthusiasm which beamed so eloquently from her eyes. When he passed her again, on the return journey from the Bishop to his seat, her face was warm with a blush, which her

brother might have observed had he regarded her.

Whether he had observed it or not, as soon as St. Cleeve had sat himself down again, Louis Glanville turned, and looked hard at the young astronomer. This was the first time that St. Cleeve and Viviette's brother had been face to face in a distinct light, their first meeting having occurred in the dusk of a railway-station. Swithin was not in the habit of noticing people's features; he scarcely ever observed any detail of physiognomy in his friends, a generalization from their whole aspect forming his idea of them; and he now only noted a young man of perhaps thirty, who lolled a good deal, and in whose small dark eyes seemed to be concentrated the activity that the rest of his frame decidedly lacked. This gentleman's eyes were henceforward, to the end of the service, con-

tinually fixed upon Swithin; but as this was their natural direction, from the position of his seat, there was no great strangeness in the circumstance.

Swithin wanted to say to Viviette, "Now I hope you are pleased; I have conformed to your ideas of my duty, leaving my fitness out of consideration;" but as he could only see her bonnet and forehead, it was not possible even to look the intelligence. He turned to his left hand, where the organ stood, with Miss Tabitha Lark seated behind it.

It being now sermon-time, the youthful blower had fallen asleep over the handle of his bellows, and Tabitha pulled out her handkerchief, apparently with the intention of flapping him awake with it. With the handkerchief tumbled out a whole family of unexpected articles: a silver thimble; item, a photograph; item, a little

purse; item, a scent-bottle; item, some loose halfpence; item, nine green gooseberries; item, a key. They rolled to Swithin's feet, and, passively obeying the first instinct which came, he picked up as many of the articles as he could find, and handed them to her, amid the smiles of the neighbours.

Tabitha was so overpowered at such a humiliating event happening to her under the very eyes of the Bishop, on this her glorious day, that she turned pale as a sheet, and could hardly keep her seat. Fearing she might faint, Swithin, who had genuinely sympathized, bent over and whispered encouragingly, "Don't mind it, Tabitha. Shall I take you out into the air?" She declined his offer, and presently the sermon came to an end.

Swithin lingered behind the rest of the congregation sufficiently long to see Lady

Constantine, accompanied by her brother, the Bishop, the Bishop's chaplain, Mr. Torkingham, and several other clergy and ladies, enter to the grand luncheon by the door which admitted from the churchyard to the lawn of Welland House; the whole group talking with a vivacity all the more intense, as it seemed, from the recent two hours' enforced repression of their social qualities within the adjoining building.

The young man stood till he was left quite alone in the churchyard, and then went slowly homeward over the hill, perhaps a trifle depressed at the impossibility of being near Viviette in this her one day of gaiety, and joining in the conversation of those who surrounded her.

Not that he felt any jealousy of her situation, as his wife, in comparison with his own. He had so clearly understood from the beginning that, in the event of

marriage, their outward lives were to run on as before, that to rebel now would have been unmanly in himself and cruel to her, by adding to embarrassments that were great enough already. His momentary doubt was of his own strength to achieve sufficiently high things to render himself, in relation to her, other than a patronized young favourite, whom she had married at an immense sacrifice of position. Now, at twenty, he was doomed to isolation even from a wife; could it be that at, say thirty, he would be welcomed everywhere?

But with motion through the sun and air his mood assumed a lighter complexion, and on reaching home he remembered with interest that Venus was in a favourable aspect for observation that afternoon.

CHAPTER XI.

MEANWHILE the interior of Welland House was in a rattle with the progress of the ecclesiastical luncheon.

The Bishop, who sat on Lady Constantine's right hand, seemed enchanted with her company, and from the beginning she engrossed his attention almost entirely. The truth was that the circumstance of her not having her whole soul centred on the success of the repast and the pleasure of Bishop Helmsdale imparted to her, in a great measure, the mood to ensure both. Her brother Louis it was who had laid out the plan of entertaining the Bishop, to

which she had assented but indifferently. She was secretly bound to another, on whose career she had staked all her happiness. Having thus other interests, she evinced to-day all the ease of one who hazards nothing, and there was no sign of that preoccupation with housewifely contingencies which often so disfigures the not over-rich hostess that she is hardly recognizable as the same charming woman who graced a friend's home the day before. In marrying Swithin, Lady Constantine had played her card,—recklessly, impulsively, ruinously, perhaps; but she had played it; it could not be withdrawn; and she took this morning's luncheon as an episode that could result in nothing to her beyond the day's entertainment.

Hence, by that power of indirectness to accomplish in an hour what strenuous aiming will not effect in a life-time, she

fascinated the Bishop to an unprecedented degree. A bachelor, he rejoiced in the hard-headed period of life that fills the tract of years between the time of waning impulse and the time of incipient dotage, when a woman can reach the male heart neither by awakening a young man's passion nor an old man's infatuation. He must be made to admire, or he can be made to do nothing. Unintentionally that is how Viviette operated on her guest.

Lady Constantine, to external view, was in a position to desire many things, and of a sort to desire them. She was obviously, by nature, warm and impulsive to indiscretion. But instead of exhibiting activities to correspond, recently gratified affection lent to her manner just now a sweet serenity, a truly Christian contentment, which it puzzled the learned Bishop exceedingly to find in a warm young

widow, and increased his interest in her every moment. Thus matters stood, when the conversation veered round to the morning's confirmation.

"That was a singularly engaging young man who came up among Mr. Torkingham's candidates," said the Bishop to her, somewhat abruptly.

But abruptness does not catch a woman without her wit. "Which one?" she said innocently.

"That youth with the 'corn-coloured' hair, as a poet of the new school would call it, who sat just at the side of the organ. Do you know who he is?"

In answering, Viviette showed a little nervousness, for the first time that day.

"Oh, yes. He is the son of an unfortunate gentleman who was formerly curate here,—a Mr. St. Cleeve."

"I never saw a handsomer young man

in my life," said the Bishop. (Lady Constantine blushed.) "There was a lack of self-consciousness, too, in his manner of presenting himself, which very much won me. A Mr. St. Cleeve, do you say? A curate's son? His father must have been St. Cleeve of All Angels, whom I knew. How comes he to be staying on here? What is he doing?"

Mr. Torkingham, who kept one ear on the Bishop all the lunch-time, finding that Lady Constantine was not ready with an answer, hastened to reply: "Your lordship is right. His father was an All Angels' man. The youth is rather to be pitied."

"He was a man of talent," affirmed the Bishop. "But I quite lost sight of him."

"He was curate to the late vicar," resumed the parson, "and was much liked by the parish: but, being erratic in his tastes and tendencies, he rashly contracted

a marriage with the daughter of a farmer, and then quarrelled with the local gentry for not taking up his wife. This lad was an only child. There was enough money to educate him, and he is sufficiently well provided for to be independent of the world so long as he is content to live here with great economy. But of course this gives him few opportunities of bettering himself."

"Yes, naturally," replied Bishop Helmsdale. "Better have been left entirely dependent on himself. These half-incomes do men little good, unless they happen to be either weaklings or geniuses."

Lady Constantine would have given the world to say, "He is a genius, and the hope of my life;" but it would have been decidedly risky, and in another moment was unnecessary, for Mr. Torkingham said, "There is a certain genius in this young man, I sometimes think."

"Well, he really looks quite out of the common," said the Bishop.

"Youthful genius is sometimes disappointing," observed Viviette, not believing it in the least.

"Yes," said the Bishop. "Though it depends, Lady Constantine, on what you understand by disappointing. It may produce nothing visible to the world's eye, and yet may complete its development within in a very perfect degree. Objective achievements, though the only ones which are counted, are not the only ones that exist and have value; and I for one should be sorry to assert that, because a man of genius dies as unknown to the world as when he was born, he therefore was an instance of wasted material."

Objective achievements were, however, those that Lady Constantine had a weakness for in the present case, and she asked

her more experienced guest if he thought early development of a special talent a good sign in youth.

The Bishop thought it well that a particular bent should not show itself too early, lest disgust should result.

"Still," argued Lady Constantine rather firmly (for she felt this opinion of the Bishop's to be one throwing doubt on Swithin), "sustained fruition is compatible with early bias. Tycho Brahe showed quite a passion for the solar system when he was but a youth, and so did Kepler; and James Ferguson had a surprising knowledge of the stars by the time he was eleven or twelve."

"Yes, sustained fruition," conceded the Bishop (rather liking the words), "is certainly compatible with early bias. Fénelon preached at fourteen."

"He—Mr. St. Cleeve—is not in the church," said Lady Constantine.

"He is a scientific young man, my lord," explained Mr. Torkingham.

"An astronomer," she added, with suppressed pride.

"An astronomer! Really, that makes him still more interesting than being handsome and the son of a man I knew. How and where does he study astronomy?"

"He has a beautiful observatory. He has made use of an old column that was erected on this manor to the memory of one of the Constantines. It has been very ingeniously adapted for his purpose, and he does very good work there. I believe he occasionally sends up a paper to the Royal Society, or Greenwich, or somewhere, and to astronomical periodicals."

"I should have no idea, from his boyish look, that he had advanced so far," the Bishop answered. "And yet I saw on his face that within there was a book worth

studying. His is a career I should very much like to watch."

A thrill of pleasure chased through Lady Constantine's heart at this praise of her chosen one. It was an unwitting compliment to her taste and discernment in singling him out for her own, despite its temporary inexpediency.

Her brother Louis now spoke. "I fancy he is as interested in one of his fellow-creatures as in the science of astronomy," observed the cynic dryly.

"In whom?" said Lady Constantine quickly.

"In the fair maiden who sat at the organ, —a pretty girl, rather. I noticed a sort of by-play going on between them occasionally, during the sermon, which meant mating, if I am not mistaken."

"She!" said Lady Constantine. "She is only a village girl, a dairyman's daughter,

—Tabitha Lark, who used to come to read to me."

"She may be a savage, for all that I know: but there is something between those two young people, nevertheless."

The Bishop looked as if he had allowed his interest in a stranger to carry him too far, and Mr. Torkingham was horrified at the irreverent and easy familiarity of Louis Glanville's talk in the presence of a consecrated bishop. As for Viviette, her tongue lost all its volubility. She felt quite faint at heart, and hardly knew how to control herself.

"I have never noticed anything of the sort," said Mr. Torkingham.

"It would be a matter for regret," said the Bishop, "if he should follow his father in forming an attachment that would be a hindrance to him in any honourable career; though perhaps an early marriage, abstract-

edly considered, would not be bad for him. A youth who looks as if he had come straight from old Greece may be exposed to many temptations, should he go out into the world without a friend or counsellor to guide him."

Despite her sudden jealousy, Viviette's eyes grew moist at the picture of her innocent Swithin going into the world without a friend or counsellor. But she was sick in soul and disquieted still by Louis's dreadful remarks, who, unbeliever as he was in human virtue, could have no reason whatever for representing Swithin as engaged in a private love affair, if such were not his honest impression.

She was so absorbed during the remainder of the luncheon that she did not even observe the kindly light that her presence was shedding on the right reverend ecclesiastic by her side. He reflected it back in

tones duly mellowed by his position; the minor clergy caught up the rays thereof, and so the gentle influence played down the table.

The company soon departed, when luncheon was over; and the remainder of the day passed in quietness, the Bishop being occupied in his room at the vicarage with writing letters or a sermon. Having a long journey before him the next day, he had expressed a wish to be housed for the night without ceremony, and would have dined alone with Mr. Torkingham, but that, by a happy thought, Lady Constantine and her brother were asked to join them.

However, when Louis crossed the churchyard and entered the vicarage drawing-room at seven o'clock, his sister was not in his company. She was, he said, suffering from a slight headache, and much regretted that she was on that account unable to

come. At this intelligence the social sparkle disappeared from the Bishop's eye, and he sat down to table, endeavouring to mould into the form of episcopal serenity an expression which was really one of common human disappointment.

In his simple statement, Louis Glanville had by no means expressed all the circumstances which accompanied his sister's refusal, at the last moment, to dine at her neighbour's house. Louis had strongly urged her to bear up against her slight indisposition—if it were that, and not disinclination—and come along with him on just this one occasion, perhaps a more important episode in her life than she was aware of. Viviette thereupon knew quite well that he alluded to the favourable impression she was producing on the Bishop, notwithstanding that neither of them mentioned the Bishop's name. But she did

not give way, though the argument waxed strong between them; and Louis left her in no very amiable mood, saying, "I don't believe you have any more headache than I have, Viviette. It is some provoking whim of yours—nothing more."

Now in this there was a substratum of truth. When her brother had left her, and she had seen him from the window entering the vicarage gate, Viviette seemed to be much relieved, and sat down in her dressing-room till the evening grew dark, and only the lights shining through the trees from the parsonage dining-room revealed to the eye where that dwelling stood. Then she arose, and putting on the cloak she had used so many times before for the same purpose, she locked her bedroom door (to be supposed within, in case of the accidental approach of a servant), and let herself privately out of the house.

Lady Constantine paused for a moment under the vicarage windows, till she could sufficiently well hear the voices of the diners to be sure that they were actually within, and then went on her way, which was towards the Rings-Hill column. She appeared a mere spot, hardly distinguishable from the grass, as she crossed the open ground, and soon became absorbed in the black mass of the fir plantation.

Meanwhile, the conversation at Mr. Torkingham's dinner-table was not of a highly exhilarating quality. The parson, in long self-communing during the afternoon, had decided that the Diocesan Synod, whose annual session at Melchester had occurred in the month previous, would afford a solid and unimpeachable subject to launch during the meal, whenever conversation flagged; and that it would be one likely to win the respect of his spiritual

chieftain for himself, as the introducer. Accordingly, in the further belief that you could not have too much of a good thing, Mr. Torkingham not only acted upon his idea, but at every pause rallied to the synod point with unbroken firmness. Everything which had been discussed at that last session—such as the introduction of the lay element into the councils of the church, the reconstitution of the ecclesiastical courts, church patronage, the tithe question — was revived by Mr. Torkingham, and the excellent remarks which the Bishop had made in his addresses on those subjects were quoted back to him.

As for Bishop Helmsdale himself, his instincts seemed to be to allude in a debonair spirit to the incidents of the past day—to the flowers in Lady Constantine's beds, the date of her house—perhaps with

a view of hearing a little more about their owner from Louis, who would very readily have followed the Bishop's lead, had the parson allowed him room. But this Mr. Torkingham seldom did, and about half-past nine they prepared to separate.

Louis Glanville had risen from the table, and was standing by the window, looking out upon the sky, and privately yawning, the topics discussed having been hardly in his line.

"A fine night," he said at last.

"I suppose our young astronomer is hard at work now," said the Bishop, following the direction of Louis's glance towards the clear sky.

"Yes," said the parson; "he is very assiduous whenever the nights are good for observation. I have occasionally joined him in his tower, and looked through his telescope with great benefit to my ideas of

celestial phenomena. I have not seen what he has been doing lately."

"Suppose we go?" said Louis. "Would you be interested in seeing the observatory, Bishop?"

"I am quite willing to go," said the Bishop, "if the distance is not too great. I should not be at all averse to making the acquaintance of so exceptional a young man as this Mr. St. Cleeve seems to be; and I have never seen the inside of an observatory in my life."

The intention was no sooner formed than it was carried out, Mr. Torkingham leading the way.

CHAPTER XII.

HALF an hour before this time Swithin St. Cleeve had been sitting in his cabin, at the base of the column, working out some calculations from observations taken on preceding nights, with a view to a theory that he had in his head on the motions of certain so-called fixed stars.

The evening being a little chilly a small fire was burning in the stove, and this and the shaded lamp before him lent a remarkably cosy air to the chamber. He was awakened from his reveries by a scratching at the window-pane like that of the point of an ivy leaf, which he knew to be really

caused by the tip of his sweetheart-wife's forefinger. He rose and opened the door to admit her, not without astonishment as to how she had been able to get away from her friends.

"Dearest Viv, why, what's the matter?" he said, perceiving that her face, as the lamplight fell on it, was sad, and even stormy.

"I thought I would run across to see you. I have heard something so—so—to your discredit, and I know it can't be true! I know you are constancy itself; but your constancy produces strange effects in people's eyes!"

"Good heavens! Nobody has found us out—"

"No, no—it is not that. You know, Swithin, that I am always sincere, and willing to own if I am to blame in anything. Now will you prove to me that

you are the same by owning some fault to me?"

"Yes, dear, indeed; directly I can think of one worth owning."

"I wonder one does not rush upon your tongue in a moment!"

"I confess that I am sufficiently a Pharisee not to experience that spontaneity."

"Swithin, don't speak so affectedly, when you know so well what I mean! Is it nothing to you that, after all our vows for life, you have thought it right to—flirt with a village girl?"

"Oh, Viviette!" interrupted Swithin, taking her hand, which was hot and trembling. "You who are full of noble and generous feelings, and regard me with devoted tenderness that has never been surpassed by woman,—how can you be so greatly at fault? *I* flirt, Viviette? By

thinking that you injure yourself in my eyes. Why, I am so far from doing so that I continually pull myself up for watching you too jealously, as to-day, when I have been dreading the effect upon you of other company in my absence, and thinking that you rather shut the gates against me when you have bigwigs to entertain."

"Do you, Swithin?" she cried. It was evident that the honest tone of his words was having a great effect in clearing away the clouds. She added with an uncertain smile, "But how can I believe that, after what was seen to-day? My brother, not knowing in the least that I had an iota of interest in you, told me that he witnessed the signs of an attachment between you and Tabitha Lark in church, this morning."

"Ah!" cried Swithin, with a burst of

laughter. "Now I know what you mean, and what has caused this misunderstanding! How good of you, Viviette, to come at once and have it out with me, instead of brooding over it with dark imaginings, and thinking bitter things of me, as many women would have done!" He succinctly told the whole story of his little adventure with Tabitha that morning; and the sky was clear on both sides. "When shall I be able to claim you," he added, "and put an end to all such painful accidents as these?"

She partially sighed. Her perception of what the outside world was made of, latterly somewhat obscured by solitude and her lover's company, had been revived today by her entertainment of the Bishop, clergymen, and, more particularly, clergymen's wives; and it did not diminish her sense of the difficulties in Swithin's path

to see anew how little was thought of the greatest gifts, mental and spiritual, if they were not backed up by substantial temporalities. However, the pair made the best of their future that circumstances permitted, and the interview was at length drawing to a close, when there came, without the slightest forewarning, a smart rat-tat-tat upon the little door.

"Oh, I am lost!" said Viviette, seizing his arm. "Why was I so incautious?"

"It is nobody of consequence," whispered Swithin assuringly. "Somebody from my grandmother, probably, to know when I am coming home."

They were unperceived so far, for the only window which gave light to the hut was screened by a curtain. At that moment they heard the sound of their visitors' voices, and, with a consternation as great as her own, Swithin discerned the tones of

Mr. Torkingham and the Bishop of Melchester.

"Where shall I get? What shall I do?" said the poor lady, clasping her hands.

Swithin looked around the cabin, and a very little look was required to take in all its resources. At one end, as previously explained, were a table, stove, chair, cupboard, and so on; while the other was completely occupied by an Arabian bedstead, hung with curtains of pink-and-white chintz. On the inside of the bed there was a narrow channel, about a foot wide, between it and the wall of the hut. Into this cramped retreat Viviette slid herself, and stood trembling behind the curtains.

By this time the knock had been repeated more loudly, the light through the window-blind unhappily revealing the pre-

sence of some inmate. Swithin threw open the door, and Mr. Torkingham introduced his visitors.

The Bishop shook hands with the young man, told him he had known his father, and at Swithin's invitation, weak as it was, entered the cabin, the vicar and Louis Glanville remaining on the threshold, not to inconveniently crowd the limited space within.

Bishop Helmsdale looked benignantly around the apartment, and said, "Quite a settlement in the backwoods—quite: far enough from the world to afford the votary of science the seclusion he needs, and not so far as to limit his resources. A hermit might apparently live here in as much solitude as in a primeval forest."

"His lordship has been good enough to express an interest in your studies," said Mr. Torkingham to St. Cleeve. "And

we have come to ask you to let us see the observatory."

"With great pleasure," stammered Swithin.

"Where is the observatory?" inquired the Bishop, peering round again.

"The staircase is just outside this door," Swithin answered. "I am at your lordship's service, and will show you up at once."

"And here are your books," said the Bishop, turning to the table and the shaded lamp. "You take an observation at the top, I presume, and come down here to record your observations."

The young man explained his precise processes as well as his state of mind would let him, and while he was doing so Mr. Torkingham and Louis waited patiently without, looking sometimes into the night, and sometimes through the door at the

interlocutors, and listening to their scientific converse. When all had been exhibited here below, Swithin lit his lantern, and, inviting his visitors to follow, led the way up the column, experiencing no small sense of relief as soon as he heard the footsteps of all three tramping on the stairs behind him. He knew very well that, once they were inside the spiral, Viviette was out of danger, her knowledge of the locality enabling her to find her way with perfect safety through the plantation, and into the park, home.

At the top he uncovered his equatorial, and, for the first time at ease, explained to them its beauties, and revealed by its help the glories of those stars that were eligible for inspection. The Bishop spoke as intelligently as could be expected on a topic not peculiarly his own; but, somehow, he seemed rather more abstracted in manner

now than when he had arrived. Swithin thought that perhaps the long clamber up the stairs, coming after a hard day's work, had taken his spontaneity out of him, and Mr. Torkingham was afraid that his lordship was getting bored. But this did not appear to be the case; for, though he said little, he stayed on some time longer, examining the construction of the dome after relinquishing the telescope; while occasionally Swithin caught the eyes of the Bishop fixed hard on him. "Perhaps he sees some likeness of my father in me," the young man thought; and the party making ready to leave at this time, he conducted them to the bottom of the tower.

Swithin was not prepared for what followed their descent. All were standing at the foot of the staircase. The astronomer, lantern in hand, offered to show them the way out of the plantation, to

which Mr. Torkingham replied that he knew the way very well, and would not trouble his young friend. He strode forward with the words, and Louis followed him, after waiting a moment, and finding that the Bishop would not take the precedence. The latter and Swithin were thus left together for one moment, whereupon the Bishop turned.

"Mr. St. Cleeve," he said in a low voice, "I should like to speak to you privately, before I leave, to-morrow morning. Can you meet me—let me see—in the churchyard, at half-past ten o'clock?"

"Oh, yes, my lord, certainly," said Swithin. And before he had recovered from his surprise the Bishop had joined the others in the shades of the plantation.

Swithin immediately opened the door of the hut, and scanned the nook behind the bed. As he had expected, his bird had flown.

CHAPTER XIII.

All night the astronomer's mind was on the stretch with curiosity as to what the Bishop could wish to say to him. A dozen conjectures entered his brain, to be abandoned in turn as unlikely. That which finally seemed the most plausible was that the Bishop, having become interested in his pursuits, and entertaining friendly recollections of his father, was going to ask if he could do anything to help him on in the profession he had chosen. Should this be the case, thought the suddenly sanguine youth, it would seem like an encouragement to that spirit of firmness

which had led him to reject his late uncle's offer, because it involved the renunciation of Lady Constantine.

At last he fell asleep; and when he awoke it was so late that the hour was ready to solve what conjecture could not. After a hurried breakfast he paced across the fields, entering the churchyard by the south gate precisely at the appointed minute.

The inclosure was well adapted for a private interview, being bounded by bushes of laurel and alder nearly on all sides. He looked round; the Bishop was not there, nor any living creature save himself. Swithin sat down upon a tombstone to await Bishop Helmsdale's arrival.

While he sat he fancied he could hear voices in conversation not far off, and further attention convinced him that they came from Lady Constantine's lawn, which

was only divided from the churchyard by a high wall and shrubbery. As the Bishop still delayed his coming, though the time was nearly eleven, and as the lady whose sweet voice mingled with those heard from the lawn was his personal property, Swithin became exceedingly curious to learn what was going on within that screened promenade. A way of doing so occurred to him. The key was in the church door; he opened it, entered, and ascended to the ringers' loft in the west tower. At the back of this was a window commanding a full view of Viviette's garden front.

The flowers were all in gayest bloom, and the creepers on the walls of the house were bursting into tufts of young green. A broad gravel-walk ran from end to end of the façade, terminating in a large conservatory. In the walk were three people pacing up and down. Lady Constantine's

was the central figure, her brother being on one side of her, and a stately form in a corded shovel-hat of glossy beaver and black breeches, on the other. This was the Bishop. Viviette carried over her shoulder a sunshade lined with red, which she twirled idly. They were laughing and chatting gaily, and when the group approached the churchyard many of their remarks entered the silence of the church tower through the ventilator of the window.

The conversation was general, yet interesting enough to Swithin. At length Louis stepped upon the grass, and picked up something, which turned out to be a bowl that had lain there: throwing it forward, he took a second, and bowled it towards the first, or jack. The Bishop, who seemed to be in a sprightly mood, followed suit, and bowled one in a curve towards the jack, turning and speaking to

Lady Constantine as he concluded the feat. As she had not left the gravelled terrace he raised his voice, so that the words reached Swithin distinctly.

"Do you follow us?" he asked gaily.

"I am not skilful," she said. "I always bowl narrow."

The Bishop meditatively paused. "This moment reminds one of the scene in *Richard the Second*," he said. "I mean the Duke of York's garden, where the queen and her two ladies play, and the queen says,—

'What sport shall we devise here in this garden,
To drive away the heavy thought of care?'

To which her lady answers, 'Madam, we'll play at bowls.'"

"That's an unfortunate quotation for you," said Lady Constantine; "for if I don't forget, the queen declines, saying, ''Twill make me think the world is full of

rubs, and that my fortune runs against the bias.'"

"Then I cite *mal à propos*. But it is an interesting old game, and might have been played at that very date, on this very green."

The Bishop lazily bowled another, and while he was doing it Viviette's glance rose by accident to the church-tower window, where she recognized Swithin's face. Her surprise was only momentary; and waiting till both her companions' backs were turned, she smiled and blew him a kiss. In another minute she had another opportunity, and blew him another; afterwards blowing him one a third time.

Her blowings were put a stop to by the Bishop and Louis throwing down the bowls and rejoining her in the path, the house-clock at the moment striking half-past eleven.

"This is a fine way of keeping an engagement," said Swithin to himself. "I have waited an hour while you indulge in those trifles."

He fumed, turned, and behold somebody was at his elbow: Tabitha Lark. Swithin started, and said, "How did you come here, Tabitha?"

"In the course of my calling, Mr. St. Cleeve," said the smiling girl. "I come to practise on the organ. When I entered I saw you up here through the tower arch, and I crept up to see what you were looking at. The Bishop is a striking man, is he not?"

"Yes, rather," said Swithin.

"I think he is much devoted to Lady Constantine, and I am glad of it. Aren't you?"

"Oh, yes—very," said Swithin, wondering if Tabitha had seen the tender little

salutes between Lady Constantine and himself.

"I don't think she cares much for him," added Tabitha judicially. "Or, even if she does, she could be got away from him in no time by a younger man."

"Pooh, that's nothing," said Swithin impatiently.

Tabitha then remarked that her blower had not come to time, and that she must go to look for him; upon which she descended the stairs, and left Swithin again alone.

A few minutes later the Bishop suddenly looked at his watch, Lady Constantine having withdrawn towards the house. Apparently apologizing to Louis, the Bishop came down the terrace, and through the door into the churchyard. Swithin hastened downstairs, and joined him in the path under the sunny wall of the aisle.

Their glances met, and it was with some consternation that Swithin beheld the change that a few short minutes had wrought in that episcopal countenance. On the lawn with Lady Constantine, the rays of an almost perpetual smile had brightened his dark aspect like flowers in a shady place: now the smile was gone as completely as yesterday; the lines of his face were firm; his dark eyes and whiskers were overspread with gravity; and, as he gazed upon Swithin from the repose of his stable figure, it was like an evangelized King of Spades come to have it out with the Knave of Hearts.

To return for a moment to Louis Glanville. He had been somewhat struck with the abruptness of the Bishop's departure, and more particularly by the circumstance that he had gone away by the private

door into the churchyard, instead of by the regular exit on the other side. True, great men were known to suffer from absence of mind, and Bishop Helmsdale, having a dim sense that he had entered by that door yesterday, might have unconsciously turned thitherward now. Louis, upon the whole, thought little of the matter, and being now left quite alone on the lawn, he seated himself in an arbour, and began smoking.

The arbour was situated against the churchyard wall. The atmosphere was as still as the air of a hot-house; fourteen inches of brickwork only divided Louis from the scene of the Bishop's interview with St. Cleeve, and, as voices on the lawn had been audible to Swithin in the churchyard, voices in the churchyard could be heard without difficulty from that close corner of the lawn. No

sooner had Louis lit a cigar than the dialogue began.

"Ah, you are here, St. Cleeve," said the Bishop, hardly replying to Swithin's good morning. "I fear I am a little late. Well, my request to you to meet me may have seemed somewhat unusual, seeing that we were strangers till a few hours ago."

"I don't mind that, if your lordship wishes to see me."

"I thought it best to see you regarding your confirmation yesterday; and my reason for taking a more active step with you than I should otherwise have done is that I have some interest in you through having known your father when we were undergraduates. His room was on the same staircase with mine at All Angels, and we were friendly till time and affairs separated us even more completely than usually happens. However, about your presenting

yourself for confirmation." (The Bishop's voice grew stern.) "If I had known yesterday morning what I knew twelve hours later, I wouldn't have confirmed you at all."

"Indeed, Bishop Helmsdale!"

"Yes, I say it, and I mean it. I visited your observatory last night."

"You did, my lord."

"In inspecting it I noticed something which I may truly describe as extraordinary. I have had young men present themselves to me who turned out to be notoriously unfit, either from giddiness, from being profane or intemperate, or from some bad quality or other. But I never remember a case which equalled the cool culpability of this. While infringing the first principles of social decorum, you might at least have respected the ordinance sufficiently to have stayed away from it

altogether. Now I have sent for you here to see if a last entreaty and a direct appeal to your sense of manly uprightness will have any effect in inducing you to change your course of life."

The voice of Swithin in his next remark showed how tremendously this attack of the Bishop had told upon his feelings. Louis, of course, did not know the reason why the words should have affected him precisely as they did; to any one in the secret, the double embarrassment arising from misapprehended ethics and inability to set matters right, because his word of secrecy to another was inviolable, would have accounted for the young man's emotion sufficiently well.

"I am very sorry your lordship should have seen anything objectionable," said Swithin. "May I ask what it was?"

"You know what it was. Something

in your chamber, which forced me to the above conclusions. I disguised my feelings of sorrow at the time for obvious reasons, but I never in my whole life was so shocked!"

"At what, my lord?"

"At what I saw."

"Pardon me, Bishop Helmsdale, but you said just now that we are strangers; so what you saw in my cabin concerns me only."

"There I contradict you. Twenty-four hours ago that remark would have been plausible enough; but by presenting yourself for confirmation at my hands, you have invited my investigation into your principles."

Swithin sighed. "I admit it," he said.

"And what do you find them?"

"You say reprehensible. But you might at least let me hear the proof."

"I can do more. I can let you see it."

There was a pause. Louis Granville was so highly interested that he stood upon the seat of the arbour, and looked through the leafage over the wall. The Bishop had produced an article from his pocket.

"What is it?" said Swithin, laboriously scrutinizing the object as if he did not understand its nature or use.

"Why, don't you see?" said the Bishop, holding it out between his finger and thumb in Swithin's face. "A bracelet,—a coral bracelet. I found it on the coverlet in your chamber. And of the sex of the owner there can be no doubt. More than that, she was concealed behind the curtains, for I saw them move." In the decision of his opinion the Bishop threw the coral bracelet down on a tombstone.

"Nobody was in my room, my lord, who had not a perfect right to be there," said the younger man firmly.

"Well, well, that's a matter of assertion. Now don't get into a passion, and say to me in your haste what you'll repent of saying afterwards."

"I am not in a passion, I assure your lordship. I am too sad for passion."

"Very well; that's a hopeful sign. Now I would ask you, as one man of another, do you think that to come to me, the Bishop of this large and important diocese, as you came yesterday, and pretend to be something that you are not, is quite upright conduct, leave alone religious? Think it over. We may never meet again. But bear in mind what your Bishop and spiritual head says to you, and see if you cannot mend before it is too late."

Swithin was meek as Moses, and he brushed away a tear. "My lord, I am in a difficult position," he said mournfully; "how difficult, nobody but myself can tell. I cannot explain; there are insuperable reasons against it. But will you take my word of assurance that I am not so bad as I seem? Some day I will prove it. Till then I only ask you to suspend your judgment on me."

The Bishop shook his head contemptuously, and went towards the vicarage, as if he had lost his hearing. Swithin followed him with his eyes, and Louis followed the direction of Swithin's. Before the Bishop had reached the vicarage entrance, Lady Constantine crossed in front of him. She had a basket on her arm, and was, in fact, going to visit some of the poorer cottages. Who could believe the Bishop now to be

the same man that he had been a moment before? The darkness left his face as if he had come out of a cave; his look was all sweetness, and shine, and gaiety, as he again greeted Viviette.

CHAPTER XIV.

The conversation which arose between the Bishop and Lady Constantine was of that lively and reproductive kind which cannot be ended during any reasonable halt of two people going in opposite directions. He turned, and walked with her along the laurel-screened lane that bordered the churchyard, till their voices died away in the distance. Swithin then aroused himself from his thoughtful regard of them, and went out of the churchyard by another gate.

Seeing himself now to be left alone on the scene, Louis Glanville descended from

his post of observation in the arbour. He came through the private doorway, and on to that spot among the graves where the Bishop and St. Cleeve had conversed. On the tombstone still lay the coral bracelet which Dr. Helmsdale had flung down there in his indignation; for the agitated, introspective mood into which Swithin had been thrown had banished from his mind all thought of securing the trinket, and putting it in his pocket.

Louis picked up the little red scandal-breeding thing, and while walking on with it in his hand he observed Tabitha Lark approaching the church, in company with the young blower whom she had gone in search of, to inspire her organ-practising within. Louis immediately put together, with that rare diplomatic keenness of which he was proud, the little scene he had witnessed between Tabitha and Swithin

during the confirmation, and the Bishop's stern statement as to where he had found the bracelet. He had no longer any doubt that it belonged to her.

"Poor girl!" he said to himself, and sang in an undertone,—

"Tra deri, dera,
L'histoire n'est pas nouvelle!"

When she drew nearer, Louis called her by name. She sent the boy into the church, and came forward, blushing at having been called by so fine a gentleman. Louis held out the bracelet.

"Here is something I have found, or somebody else has found," he said to her. "I won't state where. Put it away, and say no more about it. I will not mention it either. Now go on into the church, where you are going, and may God have mercy on your soul, my dear."

"Thank you, sir," said Tabitha, with

some perplexity, yet inclined to be pleased, and only recognizing in the situation the fact that Lady Constantine's humorous brother was making her a present.

"You are much obliged to me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, Miss Lark, I've discovered a secret, you see."

"What may that be, Mr. Glanville?"

"That you are in love."

"I don't admit it, sir. Who told you so?"

"Nobody. Only I put two and two together. Now take my advice. Beware of lovers! They are a bad lot, and bring young women to tears."

"Some do, I dare say. But some don't."

"And you think that in your particular case the latter alternative will hold good? We generally think we shall be lucky

ourselves, though all the world before us, in the same situation, have been otherwise."

"Oh, yes, or we should die outright of despair."

"Well, I don't think you will be lucky in your case."

"Please, how do you know so much, since my case has not yet arrived?" asked Tabitha, tossing her head a little disdainfully, but less than she might have done if he had not obtained a charter for his discourse by giving her the bracelet.

"Fie, Tabitha!"

"I tell you it has not arrived!" she said, with some anger. "I have not got a lover, and everybody knows I haven't, and it's an insinuating thing for you to say so!"

Louis laughed, thinking how natural it was that a girl should so emphatically deny

circumstances that would not bear curious inquiry.

"Why, of course I meant myself," he said soothingly. "So, then, you will not accept me?"

"I didn't know you meant yourself," she replied. "But I won't accept you. And I think you ought not to jest on such subjects."

"Well, perhaps not. However, don't let the Bishop see your bracelet, and all will be well. But mind, lovers are deceivers."

Tabitha laughed, and they parted, the girl entering the church. She had been feeling almost certain that, having accidentally found the bracelet somewhere, he had presented it in a whim to her as the first girl he met. Yet now she began to have momentary doubts whether he had not been labouring under a mistake, and

had imagined her to be the owner. The bracelet was not valuable; it was, in fact, a mere toy,—the pair of which this was one being a little present made to Lady Constantine by Swithin on the day of their marriage; and she had not worn them with sufficient frequency out of doors for Tabitha to recognize either as positively her ladyship's. But when, out of sight of the blower, the girl momentarily tried it on, in a corner by the organ, it seemed to her that the ornament was possibly Lady Constantine's. Now that the pink beads shone before her eyes on her own arm, she remembered having seen a bracelet with just such an effect gracing the wrist of Lady Constantine, upon one occasion. A temporary self-surrender to the sophism that if Mr. Louis Glanville chose to give away anything belonging to his sister, she, Tabitha, had a right to take it without

question, was soon checked by a resolve to carry the tempting strings of coral to her ladyship that evening, and inquire the truth about them. This decided on, she slipped the bracelet into her pocket, and played her voluntaries with a light heart.

Bishop Helmsdale did not tear himself away from Welland till about two o'clock that afternoon, which was three hours later than he had intended to leave. It was with a feeling of relief that Swithin, looking from the top of the tower, saw the carriage drive out from the vicarage into the turnpike-road, and whirl the right reverend gentleman again towards Warborne. The coast being now clear of him, Swithin meditated how to see Viviette, and explain what had happened. With this in view he waited where he was till evening came on.

Meanwhile Lady Constantine and her brother dined by themselves at Welland House. They had not met since the morning, and as soon as they were left alone Louis said, "You have done very well so far; but you might have been a little warmer."

"Done well?" she asked, with surprise.

"Yes; with the Bishop. The difficult question is how to follow up our advantage. How are you to keep yourself in sight of him?"

"Heavens, Louis! You don't seriously mean that the Bishop of Melchester has any feelings for me other than friendly?"

"Viviette, this is affectation. You know he has as well as I do."

She sighed. "Yes," she said. "I own I had a suspicion of the same thing. What a misfortune!"

"A misfortune? Surely the world is

turned upside down! You will drive me to despair about our future, if you see things so awry. Exert yourself to do something, so as to make of this accident a stepping-stone to higher things. The gentleman will give us the slip, if we don't pursue the friendship at once."

"I cannot have you talk like this," she cried impatiently. "I have no more thought of the Bishop than I have of the Pope. I would much rather not have had him here to lunch at all. You said it would be necessary to do it, and an opportunity, and I thought it my duty to show some hospitality when he was coming so near, Mr. Torkingham's house being so small. But of course I understood that the opportunity would be one for you in getting to know him, your prospects being so indefinite at present; not one for me."

"If you don't follow up this chance of

being spiritual queen of Melchester, you will never have another of being anything. Mind this, Viviette: you are not so young as you were. You are getting on to be a middle-aged woman, and your black hair is precisely of the sort which time quickly turns grey. You must make up your mind to grizzled bachelors or widowers. Young marriageable men won't look at you; or if they do just now, in a year or two more they'll despise you as an antiquated party."

Lady Constantine perceptibly paled. "Young men what?" she asked. "Say that again."

"I said it was no use to think of young men: they won't look at you much longer; or if they do, it will be to look away again very quickly."

"You imply that if I were to marry a man younger than myself he would speedly acquire a contempt for me? How much

younger must a man be than his wife—to get that feeling for her?" She was resting her elbow on the chair as she faintly spoke the words, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"An exceedingly small number of years," said Louis drily. "Now the Bishop is at least fifteen years older than you, and on that account, no less than on others, is an excellent match. You would be head of the church in this diocese: what more can you require, after these years of miserable obscurity? In addition, you would escape that minor thorn in the flesh of bishops' wives, of being only Mrs. while their husbands are peers."

She was not listening; his previous observation still detained her thoughts.

"Louis," she said, "in the case of a woman marrying a man much younger than herself, does he get to dislike her, even if

there has been a social advantage to him in the union?"

"Yes,—not a whit less. Ask any person of experience. But what of that? Let's talk of our own affairs. You say you have no thought of the Bishop. And yet if he had stayed here another day or two he would have proposed to you straight off."

"Seriously, Louis, I could not accept him."

"Why not?"

"I don't love him."

"Oh, oh, I like those words!" cried Louis, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking at the ceiling in satirical enjoyment. "A woman who at two-and-twenty married for convenience, at nearly thirty talks of not marrying without love; the rule of inverse, that is, in which more requires less, and less requires more. As

your only brother, older than yourself, and more experienced, I insist that you encourage the Bishop."

"Don't quarrel with me, Louis!" she said piteously. "We don't know that he thinks anything of me,—we only guess."

"I know it,—and you shall hear how I know. I am of a curious and conjectural nature, as you are aware. Last night, when everybody had gone to bed, I stepped out for a five minutes' smoke on the lawn, and walked down to where you get near the vicarage windows. While I was there in the dark, one of them opened, and Bishop Helmsdale leant out. The illuminated oblong of your window shone him full in the face between the trees, and presently your shadow crossed it. He waved his hand, and murmured some tender words, though what they were exactly I could not hear."

"What a vague, imaginary story,—as if he could know my shadow! Besides, a man of the Bishop's dignity wouldn't have done such a thing. When I knew him as a younger man he was not at all romantic, and he's not likely to have grown so now."

"That's just what he is likely to have done. No lover is so extreme a specimen of the species as an old lover. Come, Viviette, no more of this fencing. I have entered into the project heart and soul—so much that I have postponed my departure till the matter is well under way."

"Louis—my dear Louis—you will bring me into some disagreeable position!" said she, clasping her hands. "I do entreat you not to interfere, or do anything rash about me. The step is impossible. I have something to tell you some day. I must live on, and endure—"

"Everything except this penury," replied Louis, unmoved. "Come, I have begun the campaign by inviting Bishop Helmsdale, and I'll take the responsibility of carrying it on. All I ask of you is not to make a ninny of yourself. Come, give me your promise!"

"No, I cannot,—I don't know how to! I only know one thing,—that I am in no hurry—"

"'No hurry' be hanged! Agree, like a good sister, to charm the Bishop."

"I must consider!" she replied, with perturbed evasiveness.

It being a fine evening Louis went out of the house to enjoy his Havanah in the shubbery. On reaching his favourite seat he found he had left his cigar-case behind him; he immediately returned for it. When he approached the window by which he had emerged, he saw Swithin St.

Cleeve standing there in the dusk, talking to Viviette inside.

St. Cleeve's back was towards Louis, but, whether at a signal from her or by accident, he quickly turned and recognized Glanville; whereupon, raising his hat to Lady Constantine, the young man passed along the terrace-walk and by the churchyard door.

Louis rejoined his sister. "I didn't know you allowed your lawn to be a public thoroughfare for the parish," he said suspiciously.

"I am not exclusive, especially since I have been so poor," replied she.

"Then do you let everybody pass this way, or only that illustrious youth because he is so good-looking?"

"I have no strict rule in the case. Mr. St. Cleeve is an acquaintance of mine, and he can certainly come here if he chooses."

Her colour rose somewhat, and she spoke warmly.

Louis was too cautious a bird to reveal to her what had suddenly dawned upon his mind—that his sister, in common with the (to his thinking) unhappy Tabitha Lark, had been foolish enough to get interested in this phenomenon of the parish, this scientific Adonis. But he resolved to cure at once her tender feeling, if it existed, by letting out a secret which would inflame her dignity against the weakness.

"A good-looking young man," he said, with his eyes where Swithin had vanished. "But not so good as he looks. In fact, a regular young sinner."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, only a little feature I discovered in St. Cleeve's history. But I suppose he has a right to sow his wild oats as well as other young men."

"Tell me what you allude to,—do, Louis."

"It is hardly fit that I should. However, the case is amusing enough. I was sitting in the arbour to-day, and was an unwilling listener to the oddest interview I ever heard of. Our friend the Bishop discovered, when we visited the observatory last night, that our astronomer was not alone in his seclusion. A lady shared his romantic cabin with him; and finding this, the Bishop naturally enough felt that the ordinance of confirmation had been profaned. So his lordship sent for Master Swithin this morning, and meeting him in the churchyard, read him such an excommunicating lecture as I warrant he won't forget in his lifetime. Ha-ha-ha! 'Twas very good,—very."

He watched her face narrowly, while he spoke with such seeming carelessness. Instead of the agitation of jealousy that he

had expected to be aroused by this hint of another woman in the case, there was a curious expression, more like embarrassment than anything else, which might have been fairly attributed to the subject. "Can it be that I am mistaken?" he asked himself.

The possibility that he might be mistaken restored Louis to goodhumour, and the lights having been brought he sat with his sister for some time, talking with purpose of Swithin's low rank on one side, and the sordid struggles that might be in store for him. St. Cleeve being in the unhappy case of deriving his existence through two channels of society, it resulted that he seemed to belong to either this or that, according to the attitude of the beholder. Louis threw the light entirely on Swithin's agricultural side, bringing out old Mrs. Martin and her connexions

and her ways of life with luminous distinctness, till Lady Constantine became greatly depressed. She, in her hopefulness, had almost forgotten, latterly, that the bucolic element, so incisively represented by Messrs. Hezzy Biles, Haymoss Fry, Sammy Blore, and the rest, entered into his condition at all; to her he had been the son of his academic father alone.

But she would not reveal the depression to which she had been subjected by this resuscitation of the homely half of poor Swithin, presently putting an end to the subject by walking hither and thither about the room.

"What have you lost?" said Louis, observing her movements.

"Nothing of consequence,—a bracelet."

"Coral?" he inquired calmly.

"Yes. How did you know it was coral? You have never seen it, have you?"

He was about to make answer; but the amazed enlightenment which her announcement had produced in him, through knowing where the Bishop had found such an article, led him to reconsider himself. Then, like an astute man, by no means sure of the dimensions of the intrigue he might be unearthing, he said carelessly, "I found such a one in the churchyard to-day. But I thought it appeared to be of no great rarity, and I gave it to one of the village girls who were passing by,"

"Did she take it? Who was she?" said the unsuspecting Viviette.

"Really, I don't remember. I suppose it is of no consequence?"

"Oh, no; its value is nothing, comparatively. It was only one of a pair such as young girls wear." Lady Constantine could not add that, in spite of this, she

herself valued it as being Swithin's present, and the best he could afford.

Panic-struck by his ruminations, although revealing nothing by his manner, Louis soon after went up to his room, professedly to write letters. He gave vent to a low whistle when he was out of hearing. He of course remembered perfectly well to whom he had given the corals, and resolved to seek out Tabitha the next morning to ascertain whether she could possibly have owned such a trinket, as well as his sister,—which at present he very greatly doubted, though fervently hoping that she might.

CHAPTER XV.

THE effect upon Swithin of the interview with the Bishop had been a very marked one. He felt that he had good ground for resenting that dignitary's tone in haughtily assuming that all must be sinful which at the first blush appeared to be so, and in narrowly refusing a young man the benefit of a single doubt. Swithin's assurance that he would be able to explain all some day had been taken in contemptuous incredulity.

"He may be as virtuous as his prototype Timothy; but he's an opinionated old fogey, all the same," said St. Cleeve petulantly.

Yet, on the other hand, Swithin's nature was so fresh and ingenuous, notwithstanding that recent affairs had somewhat denaturalized him, that for a man in the Bishop's position to think him immoral was almost as overwhelming as if he had actually been so, and at moments he could scarcely bear existence under so gross a suspicion. What was his union with Lady Constantine worth to him when, by reason of it, he was thought a reprobate by almost the only man who had professed to take an interest in him?

Certainly, by contrast with his air-built image of himself as a worthy astronomer, received by all the world, and the envied husband of Viviette, the present imputation was humiliating. The glorious light of this tender and refined passion seemed to have become debased to burlesque hues by pure accident, and his æsthetic no less

than his ethic taste was offended by such an anticlimax. He who had soared amid the remotest grandeurs of nature had been taken to task on a rudimentary question of morals, which had never been a question with him at all. This was what the exigencies of an awkward attachment had brought him to; but he blamed the circumstances, and not for one moment Lady Constantine.

Having now set his heart against a longer concealment, he was disposed to think that an excellent way of beginning a revelation of their marriage would be by writing a confidential letter to the Bishop, detailing the whole case. But it was impossible to do this on his own responsibility. He still recognized the understanding entered into with Viviette, before the marriage, to be as binding as ever,—namely, that the initiative in disclosing their union should come from

her. Yet he hardly doubted that she would take that initiative when he told her of his extraordinary reprimand in the churchyard.

This was what he had come to do when Louis saw him standing at the window. But before he had said half-a-dozen words to Viviette she motioned him to go on, which he mechanically did, ere he could sufficiently collect his thoughts on its advisability or otherwise. He did not, however, go far. While Louis and his sister were discussing him in the drawing-room he lingered, musing in the churchyard, hoping that she might be able to escape and join him in the consultation he so earnestly desired.

She at last found opportunity to do this. As soon as Louis had left the room, and shut himself in upstairs, she ran out by the window in the direction Swithin had

taken. When her footsteps began crunching on the gravel he came forward from the churchyard door.

They embraced each other in haste, and then, in a few short panting words, she explained to him that her brother had heard and witnessed the interview on that spot between himself and the Bishop, and had told her the substance of the Bishop's accusation, not knowing she was the woman in the cabin.

"And what I cannot understand is this," she added, "how did the Bishop discover that the person behind the bed-curtains was a woman, and not a man?"

Swithin explained that in addition to seeing the curtains move the Bishop had unluckily found on the bed a bracelet she had dropped there, and had brought it to him in the churchyard.

"Oh, Swithin, what do you say? Found

the coral bracelet? What did you do with it?"

Swithin clapped his hand to his pocket. "Dear me! I recollect—I left it where it lay on Reuben Heath's tombstone."

"Oh, my dear, dear Swithin!" she cried miserably. "You have compromised me by your forgetfulness. I have claimed the article as mine. My brother did not tell me that the Bishop brought it from the cabin. What can I, can I do, that neither the Bishop nor my brother may conclude *I* was the woman there?"

"But if we announce our marriage—"

"Even as your wife, the position was too undignified—too I don't know what—for me ever to admit that I was there! Right or wrong, I must declare the bracelet was not mine. Such an escapade—why, it would make me ridiculous in the county; and anything rather than that."

"I was in hope that you would agree to let our marriage be known," said Swithin, with some disappointment. "I thought that these circumstances would make the reason for doing so doubly strong."

"Yes. But there are, alas, reasons against it still stronger! Let me have my way."

"Certainly, dearest. I promised that before you agreed to be mine. My reputation—what is it! Perhaps I shall be dead and forgotten before the next transit of Venus!"

She soothed him tenderly, but could not tell him why she felt the reasons against any announcement as yet to be stronger than those in favour of it. How could she, when her feeling had been cautiously fed and developed by her brother Louis's unvarnished exhibition of Swithin's material position in the eyes of the world?—that of

a young man, the scion of a family of farmers recently her tenants, living at the homestead with his grandmother, Mrs. Martin.

That this objection, at present so strong in her, was only temporary she quite believed, and was as convinced of his coming success as ever; praying and hoping for it on his account not less than on her own. She hoped all the more earnestly from an occasional twinge of conscience on the question whether his marriage with her had been so greatly for his good as they conventionally assumed it to be. She could not be blind to the fact that she had agreed to the step as much for her own pleasure as from a disinterested wish to release his mind from a distraction which was fatal to his studies; that had Swithin never seen her it would probably have been far better for him and

his prospects, since (excepting the equatorial) she had brought him no solid help as yet, either in wealth or friends.

To soften her refusal, she said in declaring it, "One concession, Swithin, I certainly will make. I will see you oftener. I will come to the cabin and tower frequently; and will contrive, too, that you come to the house occasionally. During the last winter we passed whole weeks without meeting; don't let us allow that to happen again."

"Very well, dearest," said Swithin, good-humouredly. "I don't care so terribly much for the old man's opinion of me, after all. For the present, then, let things be as they are."

Nevertheless, the youth felt her refusal more than he owned; but the unequal temperament of Swithin's age, so soon depressed on his own account,

was also soon to recover on hers, and it was with almost a child's forgetfulness of the past that he took her view of the case.

When he was gone she hastily re-entered the house. Her brother had not re-appeared from upstairs; but she was informed that Tabitha Lark was waiting to see her, if her ladyship would pardon the said Tabitha for coming so late. Lady Constantine made no objection, and saw the young girl at once.

When Lady Constantine entered the waiting-room, behold, in Tabitha's outstretched hand lay the coral ornament which had been causing Viviette so much anxiety.

"I guessed, on second thoughts, that it was yours, my lady," said Tabitha, with rather a frightened face; "and so I have brought it back."

"But how did you come by it, Tabitha?"

"Mr. Glanville gave it to me; he must have thought it was mine. I took it, fancying at the moment that he handed it to me because I happened to come by first after he had found it."

Lady Constantine saw how the situation might be improved so as to effect her deliverance from this troublesome little web of evidence.

"Oh, you can keep it," she said brightly. "It was very good of you to bring it back. But keep it for your very own. Take Mr. Glanville at his word, and don't explain. And, Tabitha, divide the strands into two bracelets; there are enough of them to make a pair."

The next morning, in pursuance of his resolution, Louis wandered round the grounds till he saw the girl for whom he

was waiting enter the church. He accosted her over the wall. But, puzzling to view, a coral bracelet blushed on each of her young arms, for she had promptly carried out the suggestion of Lady Constantine.

"You are wearing it, I see, Tabitha, with the other," he murmured. "Then you mean to keep it?"

"Yes, I mean to keep it."

"You are sure it is not Lady Constantine's? I find she had one like it."

"Quite sure. But you had better take it to her, sir, and ask her," said the saucy girl.

"Oh, no; that's not necessary," replied Louis, considerably shaken in his convictions."

When Louis met his sister, a short time after, he did not catch her, as he had intended to do, by saying suddenly, "I

have found your bracelet. I know who has got it."

"You cannot have found it," she replied quietly, "for I have discovered that it was never lost," and stretching out both her hands she revealed one on each, Viviette having performed the same operation with her remaining bracelet that she had advised Tabitha to do with the other.

Louis was mystified, but by no means convinced. In spite of this attempt to hoodwink him, his mind returned to the subject every hour of the day. There was no doubt that either Tabitha or Viviette had been with Swithin in the cabin. He recapitulated every case that had occurred during his visit to Welland in which his sister's manner had been of a colour to justify the suspicion that it was she. There was that strange incident in the corridor, when she had screamed at what

she described to be a shadowy resemblance to her late husband; how very improbable that this fancy should have been the only cause of her agitation! Then he had noticed, during Swithin's confirmation, a blush upon her cheek when he passed her on his way to the Bishop, and the fervour in her glance during the few moments of the imposition of hands. Then he suddenly recalled the night at the railway station, when the accident with the whip took place, and how, when he reached Welland House, an hour later, he had found no Viviette there. Running thus from incident to incident, he increased his suspicions without being able to cull from the circumstances anything amounting to evidence; but evidence he now determined to acquire without saying a word to any one.

His plan was of a cruel kind: to set

a trap into which the pair would blindly walk, if any secret understanding existed between them of the nature he suspected.

END OF VOL. II.

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